



PASSENGERS Voice

JANUARY 2020 | VOL. 54, NO. 1

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Sometimes when you're in the middle of a battle, you never get the chance to stick your head up from the trench and see how things really are. Now that we're nearing 2019's end, it's a good time to lift your head up and take a look around...and when you do, you'll see what a terrific year it has been for all of us who care about passenger rail.

- **The Senate Appropriations Committee passed** an \$86.6 billion Fiscal Year 2020 transportation funding bill with \$167 million more in it than 2019 – \$58

million of which went to boost Amtrak funding. Senators approved the measure 31-0. It proves not only the new levels of bipartisan support that infrastructure investment now enjoys in Congress, but underscores bipartisan rejection of the Trump Administration's insistence on eliminating funding for the National Network.



(Photo Credit: Joe Aiello)

- **The Federal Railroad Administration released** two years' worth of capital repair grants to support 10 passenger and commuter rail projects in 10 states, finally kick-starting a long-lagging program. The \$227 million in grants are part of the Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair (SOGR) Program and will go to repair, replace, or rehabilitate publicly or Amtrak owned or controlled railcars, stations, and track infrastructure.
- **On May 24th**, the House Appropriations Committee on Transportation and Housing unanimously approved \$146 million more for passenger rail and \$60 million more for transit compared with last year's funding levels.
- **On June 3rd**, the Supreme Court rejected the Association of American Railroads' petition to hear an appeal of our Association's crucial victory for passenger rail last summer in the DC Circuit Court of Appeals.

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SOUTHEAST RAIL EXCURSION

RAIL PASSENGERS' FIELD TEAM EMBARKS ON A 2 WEEK, 7 CITY ADVOCACY TOUR

The Field Team is heading south for a thirteen day tour meeting with local officials, rail groups, reporters, and more. Joe Aiello and Madi Butler plan to highlight the economic incentive passenger rail has brought to towns along the City of New Orleans and Crescent routes. They will also address the potential benefits of restoring Gulf Coast passenger rail systems, and developing more advanced multimodal solutions moving forward.

Highlights featured in blogs to come include meetings with Mississippi Mayors Carolyn McAdams (Greenwood) Percy Bland (Meridian) and Andrew FoFo Gillich (Biloxi), returning to the now opened Central Station Hotel in Memphis, and a Members, Friends and Officials meetup in New Orleans hosted by Board Member Andrew Lodriguss. The team

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“The people of Illinois – and Amtrak riders nationwide – deserve assurance that they can arrive at their destination in a safe and timely manner.”

Senator Dick Durbin (IL)



RAIL PASSENGERS

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This issue has news through December 13, 2019.

Vol. 54, No. 1 was mailed December 27, 2019.

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That rejection cleared the way for Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to again work together to set metrics and standards for on-time performance and defend your right to be on time, and led quickly to FRA and Amtrak reaching out to us here at the Association for our proposals for new metrics.

- **The House Appropriations Committee approved** a transportation budget for FY 2020 on June 5th by a 29-21 vote, sending the bill to the floor of the House for consideration. This was great news for all of you have helped our work in Congress, where Rail Passengers advocacy continues to produce concrete

funding and policy gains.

- **On June 10th**, the Federal Railroad Administration awarded \$33 million to fund major infrastructure and capacity improvements to restore passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast, a huge step forward in the long battle to restore this missing link to the national passenger rail network. The Gulf Coast train was halted in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina severely damaged the route, and never restored — even after host railroad CSX brought the track back into operation for freight trains.

This upcoming year will be truly pivotal for passenger rail, as Congress takes up reauthorizing the FAST Act and shaping the next five-year plan for investment in transportation.

- **On June 26th**, the rights of rural, small town Americans to use passenger rail were at the forefront during a hearing titled "Amtrak: Next Steps for Passenger Rail." Held by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, the hearing featured data and information from the Association. The hearing produced several noteworthy and significant moments, which will no doubt play a big part in shaping intercity rail programs and Amtrak in the upcoming rail reauthorization.
- **On November 13**, Rail Passengers CEO Jim Mathews testified before the United States House of Representatives' Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and

Hazardous Materials. The topic was "Amtrak: Now and into the Future," and it was a great opportunity to amplify the voices of all Amtrak users and stakeholders at this incredibly important time for passenger rail. It was a wide-ranging

session, but overall, Jim laid out what our coalition believes are fundamental elements to create an equitable passenger rail network, one where growth does not require one American getting better service at the expense of another American's train.

Make no mistake: none of this was an accident. We have worked hard to make sure that your voices are being heard in the halls of Congress, in the conference rooms at the Federal Railroad Administration, and the hearing rooms of the Surface Transportation Board and the federal courts. From producing data and research reports to meeting with analysts and staff, we've been carrying our members' message directly to people in Washington who can do something about it.

This upcoming year will be truly pivotal for passenger rail, as Congress takes up reauthorizing the FAST Act and shaping the next five-year plan for investment in transportation.

Every single voice in this Association is absolutely needed, and we can't let up. So look back on the list above and take a bow. And then, take a breath and get ready for the big push in 2020!

VIEW FROM THE HILL: CONGRESS EYES SOLUTIONS FOR AMTRAK DELAYS; FREIGHT RAILROADS SAY “NOT SO FAST”

Both houses of Congress are expressing renewed interest in finally finding a solution for the problem every American train passenger knows all too well: being stuck on a train while watching a freight train slowly crawl by outside your window.

This type of freight train interference causes delays for millions of riders who rely on the Amtrak system.

In 2018 alone, Amtrak trains were delayed by freight trains on host railroads more than 100,000 times! It's not just an inconvenience -- if unchecked, it will drive away passengers and threatens the very existence of the National Network.

SENATE TAKES THE LEAD

On November 21, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the **Rail Passenger Fairness Act** to help improve Amtrak on-time performance (OTP) across the National Network by providing Amtrak with the ability to challenge freight railroads in court.

Importantly, this does not create a NEW right — it merely gives Amtrak a way to enforce the current law, which ALREADY requires freight railroads to provide preference to passenger rail operating on their rail lines.

“This bill provides Amtrak with the power to improve its passenger rail service and

efficiency,” said **Senator Durbin**. “By empowering Amtrak to hold the freight railroads accountable when they don't follow the law, we can improve Amtrak on-time performance and save taxpayer dollars. For too long, we've seen on-time performance decline as a result of freight interference. The people of Illinois – and Amtrak riders nationwide – deserve assurance that they can arrive at their destination in a safe and timely manner.”

Rail Passengers has launched a campaign in support of the Rail Passenger Fairness Act that will allow you to call, write, or tweet your elected officials to demand better rail service for Americans. Go to www.RailPassengers.org/Action to find out how you can get involved!

HARD WORDS FROM HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

While the House has yet to take up Sen. Durbin's bill, House Transportation leaders warned host railroads that if they don't find a solution for these delays, Congress will step in and introduce regulation to fix it for them.

At a hearing held Dec. 6 by the House Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, Congressional leaders looked at how the surge in the movement of goods movement is impacting

transportation investment needs—and how the added stress to the system is negatively affecting passengers.

Chair Peter DeFazio (D-OR), never one to mince words, made no secret of his displeasure in his questions to Ian Jefferies, President & CEO of the Association of American Railroads (AAR)

“I live 112 miles from [Portland, Oregon], I'd rather not drive on Interstate-5, but [Amtrak's] scheduled is 3 ½ hours for 112 miles and they frequently don't meet that. We now have freight [trains] that are running three miles long, they don't have three mile long sidings. So how do you recommend that we deal with this issue. Because I'm pretty much getting to the point of some pretty strong legislation.”

Jefferies pointed to the Metrics & Standards being developed by the Federal Railroad Administration [which Rail Passengers took part in developing], and asked Chairman DeFazio to delay any action until that is released in summer 2020.

DeFazio, however, was in no mood for more delays: “[You] have to do something here or we're going to have to do something in the surface bill that you're probably not going to like, and it's going to be very prescriptive.”

“A DAY ON, NOT OFF”

Every year, thousands of Americans celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday as “a day on, not off” by volunteering to highlight social justice issues in their communities. The need for reliable public transportation systems is an important social justice issue that we as members of the Rail Passengers Association have all stepped up to fight for, and it's important that we consistently reiterate to our local and national leadership that the lack of access to passenger rail in the places that needs it the most is unacceptable.

This MLK Day, spend time trying a new way to support rail transportation. This could include speaking with or leaving a message for your local leaders to demonstrate that you prioritize passenger rail as a societal issue and are committed to improving rail in your neighborhood. If you've never called your Congressperson, take the time to find out who represents your area and where they stand on funding and supporting rail-focused initiatives,

whether it be Amtrak, commuter rail, or your subway system. Similarly, if your local train station needs volunteers, consider checking to see if you can take part from time to time. Even chatting with those who do not frequently ride trains can be helpful to spread the word that Americans want and will use reliable passenger rail, particularly in rural areas.

Our collective effort as members of the Rail Passengers

Association creates national progress, as CEO

Jim Mathews' recent Congressional testimony demonstrated last month. Reauthorization of rail funding this year is imperative, especially for those who do not have the resources to consistently engage with community leaders on this issue. Rail Passengers is committed to fighting for more and better trains and will always appreciate your membership to represent not just the voice of the passenger, but the voice of the passenger willing to do what it takes to create A Connected America linked by passenger rail.



The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, DC
(Photo Credit: Ron Cogswell (Flicker.com))

THANK YOU!

I'm beyond thrilled to share that our Giving Tuesday Campaign raised \$5,087.50 BEFORE the match. While our goal was \$20,000, who can't be happy with an 847% increase over 2018's Giving Tuesday total. Rail Passengers Association's members and donors are a force to be reckoned with. Thank you all for your support of our end of year giving efforts! You are the reason the Association is able to continue our advocacy efforts on behalf of the American rail passenger.

As a 501(c)(3), the Rail Passengers Association relies

on the generosity of our members and donors. Without your support our collective voice would

become silent. There were many end of year engagement efforts, it was such a pleasure to tell the various aspects of the Association's story. I look forward to providing an update in the February Newsletter.

Thank you again for your support of the Rail Passengers Association, our giving and membership campaigns and advocacy efforts.

—Jonsie Stone, Director of Resource Development

“THE GREAT SOUTH DAKOTA RAIL ROBBERY!”



(Photo Credit: Dan Bilka)

By Dan Bilka, Rail Passengers Association - South Dakota Representative

The announcement to sell all state-owned railroad assets is dangerous, short-sighted, and fiscally irresponsible. This infrastructure helped establish South Dakota as the state it is today; it is disrespectful to our

forebears, and a disservice to our successors, to dispose of these critical resources so carelessly.

The revenue from the sale of these assets pales in comparison to the long-term damage that will be done to our state. The revitalization efforts of the Mitchell to Rapid City (MRC) line, and the positive benefits it has brought the communities along it, highlight the importance of preserving and revitalizing these assets for the benefit of all South Dakotans. The numerous wash-outs experienced on the Pierre to Rapid City (PRC) line underscore the need to preserve the Mitchell to Rapid City line as an alternate route due to no major washouts reported on the MRC line. The PRC line is also plagued by the instability of Pierre Shale soil.

The careless disposal of these resources jeopardizes opportunities for economic growth and innovation in the state. Infrastructure like the railroad lines currently being readied to sell make or break the economic potential of an area. These established infrastructure corridors cannot be re-created today for the little revenue their sales would generate. By disposing these assets, the state is effectively foregoing future economic possibilities and further contributing to

the brain drain so evident in this state by discarding the talent that would have the energy, ambition and expertise to rejuvenate them for the benefit of all of us.

Agriculture, our number one economic driver, is heavily dependent upon infrastructure. One of the many benefits of the revitalized Mitchell to Rapid City line is the ability to get grain to market quicker and cheaper. A 2003 Kansas DOT study illustrated the severe economic and social impacts of rural railway abandonments. Increased highway damages compounded by loss of farm income due to increased costs, combined with lost tax revenue, have long-term impacts on the economic vitality of rural regions. One unit train can haul as much as 500 semis; one semi does as much damage as 10,000 passenger vehicles. In a year when agriculture has had to deal with pronounced trade and economic angst, we do not need to exacerbate these hardships.

Tourism, our number two economic driver, also has the potential to benefit from this infrastructure. The attractions of the Black Hills already attract millions of tourists (and their spending) annually; a passenger rail connection would allow many more visitors to see these world-class attractions along with increased tax revenue.

South Dakota once lead the way in futuristic thinking; this proposal is the antithesis of that. This proposal is shortsighted and harmful to both rural and urban South Dakotans. The State DOT should immediately rescind this proposal and think strategically about the future of transportation options in the state.

Dan spoke to the South Dakota Railroad Board on this issue. [You can read his full testimony here.](#)

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plans to use this crucial time to expand membership, advocate for our causes, and promote the work our local chapters and affiliated groups are doing in the region most in need of increased accessible intercity and commuter rail service.

Our Field Team will first take the City of New Orleans southbound from Memphis stopping in Greenwood, MS on the way to the Big Easy. From there, it will be busses across to Biloxi and Mobile. This is a crucial experience and real opportunity to highlight how

these replacement services do not carry the same quantifiable economic benefits as a rail station as well as highlight why and how these things can be changed for the better with increased support, education, and activism. The last leg by rail will be Meridian, MS to Birmingham, AL on the Crescent. Meridian has a fantastic intermodal station and active downtown showing just how successful Mayor John Robert Smith's plan has been and what the results of that work have done for their community in terms of tourism and long term job creation.

JOIN RAIL PASSENGERS



RAIL PASSENGERS

A CONNECTED AMERICA

If you're reading the Passengers Voice and are a current member, **THANK YOU** for your support. Rail Passengers invites you to share our membership information with your family, friends, colleagues, etc.

If you're reading the Passengers Voice and are NOT a current member, we invite you to join.

Visit railpassengers.org/join or call 202-408-6382 to join!



LEAVE A LEGACY

Please consider the Rail Passengers Association in your will. If you have already included us in your estate plans, let Jonsie Stone know at jstone@narprail.org or 202.408.8362 Ext. 3207. We'd like

to thank you for your generosity and make sure the purpose of your gift is understood.



RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

QUESTION...

WAS YOUR LAST AMTRAK TRAIN ON TIME OR DELAYED?"



A. Yes - On Time

B. No - Delayed

Click here to submit your answer to this poll on social media at <https://www.facebook.com/narprail>, or send in your response via email to: survey@narprail.org.

Each month we conduct polls on social media and in our newsletters to spark conversation and provide another outlet for you to share your thoughts on rail.

On our Facebook page in December, we asked **"Do you have a transportation related New Year's resolution?"**

75% of the respondents happily said **'Yes – Love New Experiences'**, while the remaining **25%** replied **'No – New Year; Same Me'**.

The best comment came from **Danielle Withrow** who said 'Yes! In addition to a few Amtrak rides, I'm riding the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to Moscow next August - then on to Finland and London - all by train. Epic!'

#RAIL PASSENGERS TRAVEL REVIEW

Feedback on your recent Amtrak travel experience is very important to us! Please take a moment and tell us the good & the



bad of your journey. Share your thoughts at railpassengers.org/travelreview or scan the QR code from your mobile device.

Remember, the progression of the data we collect depends upon the feedback you provide as well as your outreach to other rail passengers. Please help us to keep this going. If you have any constructive feedback or suggestion, please send an email to TravelReview@narprail.org.

#VIEWSONATRAIN

We are sharing many of the great photos we have received on Instagram (www.instagram.com/railpassengers).

We are also still looking for more submissions. Photos can be submitted via Instagram, Facebook or Twitter depicting your experience as "The Rail Passenger" and your views from a train.

Rail Passengers Association staff will select images, which we will use as part of our new visual identity on our website, in our monthly newsletter, on social media, and more!

When submitting your photos on social media, be sure to use the hashtag #ViewsOnATrain and tag @RailPassengers.

Make Plans To Attend RailNation:DC 2020! (in Washington, DC)

Sunday, March 29 through
Wednesday, April 1!

- The Rail Passengers' 2020 Annual Advocacy Summit Is Monday, March 30; The 'Day on The Hill' & Congressional Reception Is Tuesday, March 31 And The Annual Council Business Meeting Is Wednesday, April 1.
- Host Hotel - Embassy Suites Alexandria Old Town (At The King Street Metro & Alexandria Amtrak Stations) - Discounted Group Rate Rooms Are Now Available!
- Event Registration Is Now Open!
- Visit The Event Page For Complete Information

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

Thursday & Friday, January 23 & 24
16th Annual Southwestern Rail
Conference - Dallas, TX

Saturday, March 7
2020 New York State Rail Advocates
Annual Meeting & Lunch - Schenectady, NY

Saturday, March 21
2020 New England Rail Advocates Annual
Meeting & Lunch - New London, CT

Please contact Joe Aiello (jaiello@narprail.org) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and online) of upcoming events!



ON THE MOVE

Local, state and federal transit agencies have seen several new hires and appointments in December, including:

- **Leslie Richards** has been appointed by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) as the Authority's new General Manager. Richards currently is

the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Secretary, having been appointed to this post by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf in 2015. Richards has previously served on SEPTA's Board. Richards will join SEPTA in January, following the retirement of current General Manager Jeffrey Knueppel at the end of this December.



(Photo Credit: PennDOT)

Leslie Richards



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