



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

PASSENGERS Voice

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RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION' MATHEWS TESTIFIES ON IMPORTANCE OF AMTRAK AMERICANS BEFORE CONGRESS

Rail Passengers President and CEO Jim Mathews delivered an impassioned plea to members of Congress to save the Amtrak network from financial collapse and preserve daily service during a September 9th hearing before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Rail on "Amtrak and COVID-19."

Mathews testified as part of a group of rail experts and industry voices that included Amtrak President & CEO William Flynn and TCU/IAM National President Arthur Maratea. In order to maintain social distancing, the panel testified virtually via a web connection.

You can find the full hearing here. We're including an excerpt from his testimony to the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure below:

My name is Jim Mathews, and I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Rail Passengers Association, the oldest and largest national organization serving as a voice for the more than 40 million rail passengers in the U.S. Our mission is to improve and expand conventional intercity and regional passenger train services, support higher speed rail



Jim Mathews
Rail Passengers President & CEO
Photo Credit: Rail Passengers Association

initiatives, increase connectivity among all forms of transportation and ensure safety for our country's trains and passengers. I am honored to have the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of our 28,000 members from all across the U.S. I am also conscious of the duty I have to share their growing sense of alarm over the diminishment of an essential service that their communities rely upon.

Today, I will talk about the challenges this once in a generation pandemic poses for America's rail passengers, and the consequences governmental inaction poses to the cities, towns, and rural communities

connected by our intercity rail network. I understand well that Amtrak faces real and difficult choices, and that without financial aid there are far greater risks to the network than thrice weekly (3x) service for long-distance routes—we could lose entire corridors, permanently.

When I testified before this committee less than a year ago, I was able to speak about the unique moment of strength America's passenger rail found itself in, enjoying record ridership and record levels of federal funding. Now, however, COVID-19 has devastated the U.S. travel sector. Americans are

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“ Make no mistake: these trains are essential to the communities they serve. Congress didn't let the Federal Highway Administration close highways four days out of seven when gas tax revenues flatlined, and it shouldn't stand idly by and allow Amtrak to introduce 3x service to hundreds of communities across the U.S. ”

Jim Mathews
Rail Passengers President & CEO



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This issue has news through September 1, 2020.

Upcoming Events

Go to railpassengers.org/events for more information

Montana Passenger Rail Virtual Summit

Thursday, September 17, 2020
10:00 AM

Developing New Amtrak Corridors: Expanding the U.S. Passenger Market

Wednesday, September 23, 2020
2:30 PM

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

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foregoing travel of all types in an attempt to keep themselves, their families, and their fellow citizens safe. The result has been that, during “the COVID Period” (i.e., March 2020 – July 2020), Amtrak revenues are down 83 percent compared with the same period in 2019. This unprecedented decline in demand for passenger transportation has forced U.S. rail and transit operators to navigate unprecedented difficulties to keep these systems afloat.

Our association understands all of these factors. However, even with these exogenous shocks to demand for travel, the fact remains: Amtrak is an essential service for tens of millions of Americans and hundreds of communities. Our organization was pleased with Amtrak President & CEO William Flynn’s May 25th statement to Congress that the railroad understands “how important Amtrak service is to the nation and, particularly, small communities across the nation where we play a unique role in connecting these communities to the rest of America.” However, reducing service on the 15 long-distance routes—a vital transportation link to the 40 percent of the nation’s small and rural communities that it serves—to only three days per week speaks much louder than words. Whatever the underlying reasons, reducing frequencies across the National Network will drop a \$2 billion bomb on “flyover country.”

DEFINING AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

It’s worth taking time to be explicit about what we mean when we say Amtrak is an “essential service” to the communities it serves. For many,

it’s easier to understand why a service like the Northeast Corridor (NEC) is necessary. Without the 2,200 daily trains and 260 million annual trips the NEC carries, the regions this corridor connects would grind to a halt. How can a single daily train to a rural area also be accurately described as “essential” to the people it serves?

To understand, you have to look at the dearth of alternative transportation options faced by rural and small-town Americans. Over 62 million people live in so-called “flyover country,” a quarter of whom are veterans, another quarter are senior citizens over the age 65. Intercity rail plays an outsized role in these communities, with almost one-fifth of Amtrak’s passengers traveling to or from a rural station with no access to air service.

So while tourist travel is down, broadly, coronavirus has actually made these passenger rail services more necessary for certain segments of the population. Long-distance trains, frequently used by senior citizens and passengers with mobility impairments, provide access to healthcare facilities that would otherwise be too expensive or difficult to access. In an August letter to the U.S. Senate advocating for daily service, the Station Host Association of California, an independent volunteer organization operated in cooperation with Amtrak, shared its frontline experiences helping passengers navigate our rail system:

“Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, long distance trains provide accessible bedrooms

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VIEW FROM THE HILL: RAIL PASSENGERS ENTERS FINAL STRETCH OF FIGHT TO PREVENT TEMPORARY REDUCTIONS IN AMTRAK AND TRANSIT SERVICE

With Congress gridlocked over disagreements about the size and shape of the next coronavirus relief package, Rail Passengers is rallying our members, train and transit passengers, and our allies on Capitol Hill to pass legislation preventing devastating cuts to intercity passenger rail and transit ahead of a September 30th deadline.

House Democrats and Senate Republicans released two competing, trillion dollar-plus relief packages focusing on unemployment insurance programs, aid for businesses, and aid to schools. The House Democrats passed the HEROES Act in May, which includes \$15.75 billion for public transit and no money for Amtrak. The Senate GOP released a bill outline called the HEALS Act, which contains no funding for public transportation or Amtrak.

This is an unacceptable abdication of responsibility from our elected officials. Amtrak will need roughly \$4.5 billion to continue operations at existing levels across the National Network and avert mass layoffs that will severely damage its ability to function. U.S. public transit will need roughly \$32 billion in order to avert mass cuts to service. As of this writing, New York's MTA is contemplating **cutting up to 40 percent of its service on subways, buses and the Staten Island Railroad** to plug a \$12-billion budget hole in 2020 and 2021 resulting from a sharp drop in farebox revenue

and state and local funding—a crisis faced by dozens of major transit systems across the country.

We have been working with members and allies to raise the alarm over what a failure to act by Congress could threaten—not just a temporary reduction to 3x service on long-distance routes, but the permanent elimination of dozens of long-distance routes, State-supported corridors, and commuter rail services.

“While ridership is down across the network, these trains are even now providing an essential service for tens of millions of Americans,” said Sean Jeans-Gail, Rail Passengers Vice President of Government Affairs + Policy. “Whether it’s a nurse riding the subway to get to the hospital she works at, or a senior citizen taking an Amtrak sleeper to visit family, we can’t afford to sit by and let these critical pieces of our country’s infrastructure collapse. They will be essential to restarting our economy when the pandemic is under control.”

Our members have delivered almost 10,000 messages to hundreds of Senators and Representatives! You can take part in our campaign at RailPassengers.org/ACTION.

THE TRUE COST OF 3X

Rail Passengers has bolstered our message to Congress by producing concrete economic figures for the value of daily service to the hundreds of Amtrak-served communities.

Rail corridors generate value by acting as economic engines in the communities they operate in—through jobs, retail, mobility, tourism and real-estate development. The “profit” goes not to Amtrak, but to the communities served, often to the tune of billions of dollars. By employing a rigorous economic model we developed as part of our campaign to successfully preserve the Southwest Chief, we were able to identify the true costs of these cuts. This X BILLION in economic loss to the U.S. economy dwarfs the \$150 million in savings from 3x service and \$350 million in savings from workforce reductions Amtrak has identified.

DEADLINE FOR ACTION LOOMS

Congress has until September 30th to pass financial relief for Amtrak and other transit agencies struggling under the pandemic. While the next coronavirus legislative package is the most likely vehicle for this, Congress is also required to pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) to avert a government shutdown (the House has passed a transportation appropriations bill for FY2021, while the Senate has yet to even hold a hearing).

“It is likely that we will have to pass a continuing resolution to keep the government open past the end of this fiscal year,” said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) in an August 31st message to his colleagues. “The House will do its job to avert a shutdown that would only further damage our economy.”

The Rail Passengers Association needs supporters like you to help make a difference. Through your partnership we can continue to:

- **Advocate** for passengers of commuter, regional and inter-city rails;
- **Collaborate** with grassroots supporters, annual partners and affiliated state-level passengers' organizations;
- **Educate** tourism bureaus, lawmakers, communities and departments about the importance of rail transportation;
- **Inform commuters**, lawmakers and other rail fans about the latest rail news and happenings that impact them.
- **Because of people like you**, the Rail Passengers Association advocates on behalf of a nation of passengers and communities who depend on rail transportation for their livelihood and well-being.



As a small charitable organization, we rely on the generosity of others. Your support ensures staff has the ability to work closely with constituents, communities across the country and Congressional leadership to reinforce grassroots efforts and ensure rail passengers voices are heard loud and clear in Washington, DC.

There are easy ways to give:

1. Complete the mail-in donation form and send your donation directly to the DC Office.
2. Make a donation online by visiting railpassengers.org/donate.
3. Call the DC Office at 202-408-8362 for assistance in making a donation via credit card.
4. Recommend a grant from your donor advised fund to the Rail Passengers Association.
5. Ask your Human Resources Department about matching your membership dues or recent donation

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.



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ensuring privacy and cleanliness for any passengers who may need to travel within or out of state, and for whom the more public setting of an airplane creates a health risk.

The private rooms on the overnight trains provide an additional level of safety to travel during a pandemic while minimizing exposure to the virus. However, if the tri-weekly service intervals do not match the passengers' needs, then the entire benefit is moot."

These are just a few of the many reasons Amtrak's long-distance routes have proved to be the most resilient business line in the face of the pandemic—and Amtrak's ridership numbers back this up. Since the crisis began through the end of July, NEC revenues are down 90 percent from the same period last year, compared with a 64 percent decline for the National Network. Ridership has also flatlined across

the NEC, down 88 percent. By contrast, ridership on the long-distance routes is down only 68 percent during the COVID Period.

Perhaps one of the more significant statistics is that during the COVID Period the intercity passenger network's routes have contributed 45 percent of Amtrak's revenues, compared with 21 percent a year ago. Moreover, the "money-losing long-distance routes" have contributed the largest single share of revenues in every month since March.

Make no mistake: these trains are essential to the communities they serve. Congress didn't let the Federal Highway Administration close highways four days out of seven when gas tax revenues flatlined, and it shouldn't stand idly by and allow Amtrak to introduce 3x service to hundreds of communities across the U.S.

BEYOND THE BUILDER: MUSINGS ON RESPONSIBILITY, RECOVERY, & RIDERSHIP



(Photo Credit: Joe Aiello)

The Empire Builder arrives in Whitefish, MT

By Madi Bulter

When I began planning this excursion, I had to first weigh the risks of travel during a time like this for both my coordinator and myself. Ultimately after hearing reports that Amtrak had done everything they could to make sure their rolling stock was clean and safe, we decided to go on a multimodal exploration of a few major cities and the long distance network that connects them. At a time like this is it pertinent to document our experiences as passengers. We surely live in an era of change and as Association staff, we need to be prepared to show Congress what our members are experiencing and why we advocate on their behalf.

There are facets of the passenger experience we can not properly advocate for if we do not physically represent those for which we advocate. There is content and communications we can not manage from our home offices and attempting to do so would come across disingenuous. We want to be transparent and aggressive in our stance. We want to make sure

we document our field research in ways that prepare our staff, members, and allies to advocate for improvements we all need. I hope that my experience is something you as a passenger can benefit from reading.

I believe in the future of public transit, I believe increased long distance frequencies keep small towns from becoming isolated and rundown. In many ways, passenger rail and rail infrastructure provide so much economic and cultural benefit it stuns me to see some in Congress fail to grasp that. Meanwhile they are propping up the ever worsening and degrading farce that is the modern airline industry with money taxpayers would see a direct benefit from if it were invested in our national network, bringing jobs and stability to our communities across the country.

Asking for clean, safe, efficient service at a time like this is not unreasonable. Those elected to positions of power understand that refusal to fund these services in future stimulus bills is a slow violence against the people they

were elected to serve. If they won't go look their constituents in the face and hear their concerns, we will take those concerns to the halls of congress and make sure they listen. Same goes for Amtrak, thousands of passengers have signed petitions, written their Congresspeople, called into customer service, blogged, logged, tweeted, and emailed their absolute discontent in the elimination of daily service. We expect transparency on exactly when daily service will be restored and we will continue to push for the restoration and reconnection of the many towns the higher-ups continue to neglect.

Ultimately I would say our biggest takeaway was that it is abundantly clear providers who have prioritized staying clean, protected, and running frequently will be in the best position to get past what is happening currently if they stay funded. There must be continued funding to support the survival of the national network and regional transit solutions as well. While some people may have other means of

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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/all-aboard/join or call 202-408-6382 to join!

#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.

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That CR could also include supplemental funding to keep the trains running. However, given the uncertain duration—it may extend funding simply beyond the

election in November, or early into 2021—a CR slack the stability of a policy solution that provides a full year's worth of relief funding.

RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

QUESTION...

WHICH OF THE TWO AMTRAK LONG-DISTANCE CAR STYLES IS YOUR FAVORITE?

- A. Superliner
- B. Viewliner

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, for the Summer Issue, we asked **"What do you most look forward to on long distance trips?"**

In one of our closest polls yet, **56%** of you said you look forward to seeing the sunset from the train while **44%** love to see the sunrise.

Poll comments included:

- **Tara Floen** said it best with her comment, "New beginnings every morning."

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Name: Joshua Hirschfeld

Location: Highland, MD

What does RPA mean to you?: It can be most simply described using its acronym, only instead of standing for Rail Passengers Association, it stands for Real, Powerful Action. This action is achieved via two parts, the first being the Rail Passengers staff. Everyday, the staff works on completing the numerous tasks they have at hand, from drafting meetings and webinar agendas, to speaking with Congressional representatives, to reaching out to members for feedback, and everything in between. Though not everything that is done results in immediate, tangible changes, the combined products of all these tasks results in the much larger action we see taken by

the Rail Passengers Association, such as preserving dining service on Amtrak long distance routes and the continued operation of both the Southwest Chief and the Texas Eagle train routes. Their work, however, would not be able to make as large of an impact were it not for the second part of the Real, Powerful Action equation; the countless association members who step up and advocate for the changes they wish to see in passenger rail across the country and in their own communities. For changes to be able to occur, it requires as many individuals as possible voicing their support for it, and to rally around the same unified cause until these changes are realized. Rail Passengers members from across the country exhibit this everyday by speaking with their elected officials in Washington and at home, as well as participating in other advocacy work to promote their cause. These two parts of the Rail Passengers Association, the committed staff and the passionate members, combine together to create a powerful force in the national as well as local legislatures, ensuring a strong presence for users of passenger rail across the country so that meaningful, impactful actions can occur. It is for this reason why I recently decided to go one step further than just being a member of the Rail Passengers Association, and begin volunteering my time assisting the staff. I've observed the work and progress that the Rail Passengers Association has made over the past couple years, and so I was motivated to be a part of it. Now, I too can help to contribute to Real, Powerful Action that will provide benefits for countless numbers of people everyday, just as the Rail Passengers Association has done since its inception.

The "**Member Spotlight**" is a new monthly section where we highlight the Association's most important asset: YOU. To be considered, email Madi Bulter at mbutler@narprail.org.

BUILDER, from p. 5

transportation or the luxury of driving themselves, that does not protect the millions of us who do not. Cutting back service to less than daily on the national network and less than hourly on commuter lines is severing lifelines for those who rely on public transportation. We all must work together to assure that when we are living post-covid, we are still connected. Holding our ground as advocates will be essential in outlasting the myriad of outside interests that we always work against.

Having travelled between the Bay Area, Seattle, Whitefish, Essex, and Minneapolis using 15 different

transit options and no car -- relying on masks, distancing, hygiene, and good practices did indeed keep me safe while travelling. I would not say this means everyone should travel. I truly do appreciate the immense privilege that comes with minimal physical limitation or immunocompromisation at a time like this. I hope to be able to use those strengths to advocate on behalf of those who may not be able to represent themselves directly and that I do so with the interest of all our passengers in mind. It truly takes a strong vocal grassroots network to protect and improve our rails and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to represent such a strong community.

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND NOTICES

- Check out the new **Frequently Asked Questions** page on our website to help answer popular questions about your membership.
- **Production and mailing of the printed version of the Passengers Voice newsletter has temporarily ceased.** The Passengers Voice will still be available at www.railpassengers.org and as a downloadable PDF. For those of you who have paid extra to receive a mailed copy of the newsletter, we will extend your subscription by the number of months we are interrupted.
- While the Rail Passengers staff is working remotely, we are unable to print permanent membership cards, dues/donation acknowledgment letters, or membership/benefits information. Luckily, you can find information about your Rail Passengers membership by visiting www.railpassengers.org and selecting "My Account" to log in or create an account with us.



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