



PASSENGERS Voice

SUMMER 2020 | VOL. 54, NO. 7

CONGRESS OFFERS WAY FORWARD ON DAILY SERVICE

The U.S. House of Representatives has offered a resolution to significant cuts to Amtrak service and the elimination of thousands of railroad jobs in two pieces of recently passed legislation. While the Senate must take up these proposals before they are



Amtrak Empire Builder @ Two Medicine Trestle, Montana (Photo Credit: Loco Steve)

enacted into law, it is heartening that elected officials are offering substantive solutions to this problem in advance of the October 1st deadline for cuts in service.

The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee passed a surface transportation reauthorization (H.R. 2) that authorized a front-loaded funding structure for Amtrak.

The House Appropriations Committee, meanwhile, passed a Fiscal Year 2021 budget that provides Amtrak \$10 billion with explicit instructions that Amtrak may not eliminate service on routes below what the railroad offered in FY2019. Since Amtrak released its

service change proposals in its FY2021 supplemental request, our Association has been clear that while we strongly support emergency funds for Amtrak, any additional funds need to buy certainty for workers and passengers alike and daily train service must be the very minimum service level.

We are grateful that the House has used H.R. 2 and the FY 2021 appropriations bills to provide concrete solutions to preserve the connectivity well-being of all 500 Amtrak-served communities—including many small towns with few transportation alternatives—recognizing the critical role passenger rail and public

transit have always played in economic resilience.

“Amtrak’s long-distance routes serve millions of rural Americans with no access to airports, Americans with disabilities who can’t access airplanes, and senior citizens and people

with health issues for whom flying would pose a health risk,” wrote Rail Passengers’ President Jim Mathews in a letter thanking Chairman David Price (D-NC) and Ranking Member Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), heads of the House

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“In particular, a \$10 billion investment in Amtrak would enable us to avoid frequency reductions on our Long-Distance routes, as well as minimize any further impacts to our workforce.”

William Flynn
Amtrak President & CEO



RAIL PASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

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This issue has news through July 17, 2020.
Vol. 54, No. 7 was sent July 31, 2020.

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Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation. "COVID-19 shouldn't deny access to essential transportation services for these Americans for an extended and unspecified amount of time—particularly when exposure to coronavirus increases the risk of air travel for so many while Amtrak's sleeper car service provides a safer alternative."

Amtrak, for its part, thanked appropriators and explicitly stated this level of funding will prevent the kinds of difficult cuts the railroad has been mulling since coronavirus cratered ridership across the transportation sector.

"This historic level of investment would allow

Amtrak to address the short-term operating challenges we recently highlighted in our supplemental request letter, as well as support the longer-term capital needs that are so critical for the railroad's future," wrote Amtrak President & CEO William Flynn.

It's worth noting that the actual amount to preserve daily service and prevent thousands of layoffs and furloughs is no more than \$500 million.

To track what the Rail Passengers Association is doing to preserve daily service—and take part in our campaigns to keep the trains running through this pandemic—you can visit our resource page at railpassengers.org/3xservice.

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

VIEW FROM THE HILL: HOUSE PASSES LEGISLATION THAT WOULD REVOLUTIONIZE RAIL TRAVEL IN THE U.S.

'Rail Passengers Working on Encouraging Senate Response'

The U.S. House of Representatives passed two sweeping pieces of legislation this July that, if enacted into law, would dramatically improve passenger trains in the U.S., protecting service across the U.S. while providing meaningful funding for new equipment, new corridors, and projects to provide new capacity and ease bottlenecks on the congested corridors.

"Congress is really listening to Americans and recognizing the critical role passenger rail and public transit have always played in economic resilience," said Rail Passengers President and CEO Jim Mathews.

"The House has already passed the authorizers' ambitious policy framework for passenger rail in H.R. 2, the INVEST In America Act, and now House lawmakers are stepping up with a Fiscal 2021 money bill to make sure that Amtrak, commuter railroads and state agencies have the funds they need to keep America moving."

The H.R. 2 originated in the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in early June and

includes a rail title that invests \$60 billion in passenger rail over five years, along with \$66 billion in capital authority for mass transit over the same period. The bill offers a truly transformational approach to rail investment, including a number of innovative solutions to the problems highlighted by Rail Passengers and our members.

and Expansion (PRIME) grants will fund conventional and high speed rail projects, with priority given for projects that incorporate regional planning and/or have the support of multiple states, and to projects that provide environmental benefits, such as greenhouse gas reduction. Within the PRIME grant program, 40% is reserved for Amtrak NEC projects

| Dollars In Millions (\$) | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | FY2021 | FY2022 | FY2023 | FY2024 | FY2025 | Total - By Program |
| Amtrak - Northeast Corridor | 2,900 | 2,700 | 2,500 | 2,500 | 2,500 | 13,100 |
| Amtrak - National Network | 3,600 | 3,400 | 3,200 | 3,000 | 3,000 | 16,200 |
| PRIME Grants | 3,800 | 3,800 | 3,800 | 3,800 | 3,800 | 19,000 |
| CRISI Grants | 1,400 | 1,400 | 1,400 | 1,400 | 1,400 | 7,000 |
| RRIF Financing - CRC | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 150 |
| Restoration and Enhancement Grants | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 100 |
| Grade Crossing Separation Grants | 450 | 475 | 500 | 525 | 550 | 2,500 |
| Total - By Year | 12,200 | 11,825 | 11,450 | 11,275 | 11,300 | 58,050 |

Specifically, H.R. 2 provides \$16.2 billion for the National Network and \$13.1 billion for the Northeast Corridor over a five-year timeline, with funding frontloaded in recognition of the economic strains placed on the railroad by coronavirus. The TRAIN Act is also a new intercity passenger rail program—funded at \$19 billion over five years—for state of good repair projects, service improvement projects, and new and restored passenger corridors. These Passenger Rail Improvement, Modernization,

and 40% is reserved for projects outside the NEC, with a Federal cost-share of up to 90%.

NOT JUST FUNDING

H.R. 2 also includes a number of policy provisions that Rail Passengers has fought hard for over the course of reauthorization.

In addition to prohibitions on eliminating long-distance routes (see "Congress Offers Way Forward on Daily Service" for more details), highlights include:

FUNDING, LOGISTICS, PREPARATION AND INSPIRATION CAN FIX DINING-CAR WOES: A CHEF'S VIEW

By Chef Madi Butler, SBR Intern

It's easy to criticize the state of the Amtrak dining car, and another thing entirely to work on solutions that are feasible, timely, and inclusive. Over my past year with RPA and in my decade of Hospitality consulting experience before that, I have heard myriad opinions on food service in transit. Truth is, there is no one correct answer for all types of service. Instead, each route should have its own appropriate services and goods based on needs. The long and short of it is that regardless of feeling, nostalgia, or critique -- the data show there is room for improvement and clear-cut ways to simultaneously reinvigorate the dining and cafe cars and provide a memorable service.

If Amtrak uses and welcomes the feedback given freely by a plethora of riders from all walks of life, especially those valid critiques of the **promised-to-be-temporary national contemporary menu**, the railroad can give Food & Beverage (F&B) the overhaul it deserves even if it must be housed in existing rolling stock. We are all well aware of the challenges surrounding on-board layouts, time, and logistics. These hurdles have not drastically changed since Amtrak's inception but, the technology we can use to overcome them has indeed changed for the better. So long as we enable the means to enact these methods, we can achieve our mission.

Today there's a great opportunity to make these changes, thanks to the advancement of the Moving Forward / INVEST in



Photo Credit: Joe Aiello

America Act and repeal of the Mica Amendment's contradictory stranglehold on what these services could be. My commentary is as much a response to the sensationalist dining-car coverage of late as it is a brief overview of last year's travel, research, surveys, working group feedback, and member testimony. When the time comes I would like to publish my research and accompanying Advocate's Playbook for the Association at large.

“If Amtrak uses and welcomes the feedback given freely by a plethora of riders from all walks of life, especially those valid critiques of the promised-to-be-temporary national contemporary menu, but the railroad can give Food & Beverage the overhaul it deserves.”

Much depends on the prospective funding Congress can assure our national rail provider. I do want to clarify that my primary

concern is the continuation of daily National Network service, but that priority is only as valid as the services offered. As a Rail Passengers Association member, intern, and organizer I also want to be explicitly clear that I will always advocate for every passenger's right to healthy, fresh, allergen-free food on board. The packaging may vary, but our well-being must be a priority for the teams on board that feed us, as well as those higher up who decide how we are fed.

It's true that removing the restrictions of the often-cursed Mica Amendment could allow F&B to function in a way more akin to hotels, cruise lines, and large capacity venues, that does not inherently mean a return to white gloves and linens is reasonable, nor even that this is what the majority of frequent long-distance passengers want. Today our times require adaptability and sustainability. There needs to be a reasonable middle ground between the two

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service patterns we see on the National Network as the needs of Millennials, Boomers, and everyone in between must all be met.

I don't know a soul my age who would sign off on the current menu situation and I am exhausted by the constant blaming of a generation that can rarely afford non-coach tickets to begin with. Let's try to aim for something between a whole swordfish and a tuna sandwich. Surely this perceived dichotomy will do nothing but encourage infighting.

One way to create a solution here is predetermining what meals or snacks each passenger has on board. Removing the limitations on coach passengers' access to the dining car by allowing all passengers purchasing tickets more than one week in advance to pre-select a meal with ticket purchase through an app or by phone would be monumental in reducing food waste and labor associated costs. Of course there is the argument that on-time performance will affect dinner being served in a timely fashion. I think we can all agree that on time performance is crucial to the longevity of passenger rail and those conversations should take precedence over the dining car issue. As there are many moving parts to this, it is important to maintain perspective in triaging the concerns we can directly alleviate as an Association and those we will need to build a larger base of allies to overcome.

However, I do not believe it is too much to ask Amtrak's web and app developers to create a few checkboxes where one could indicate if they required kosher, vegan, halal, or gluten free meals

and receive an accompanying menu showing what ingredients are in the food they will eat on board. This is something Zerocater, Doordash, Caviar, and other b2b / b2bc / b2c apps have done for years.

For me this is not theoretical: while providing beta and high profile client support with catering apps in Austin TX, I worked with small teams of programmers to use scalable

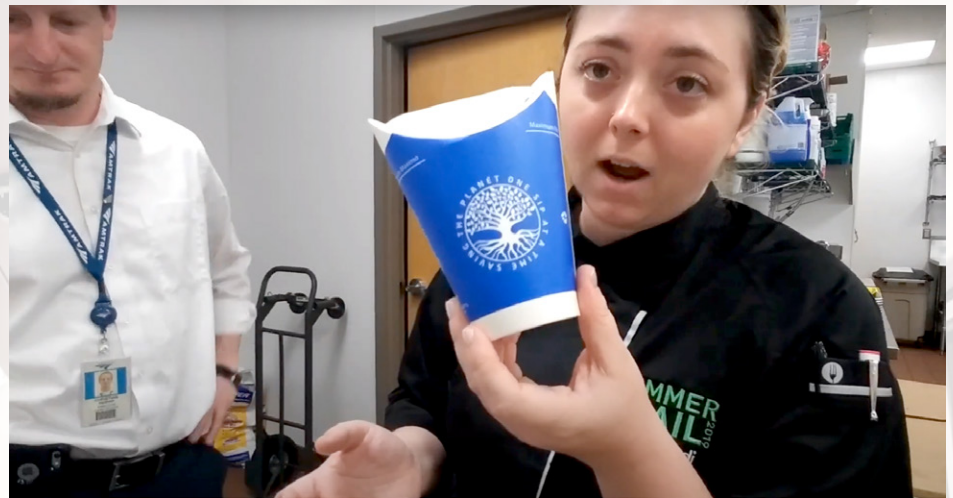


Photo Credit: Madi Butler

solutions to similar problems as we see with the Amtrak online experience. To me, the passenger's journey begins from the call or login when they order tickets. By changing this preliminary impression and investing up front in an accessible web platform as well as retaining the call center staff to assist those who can not go online, we would see a lasting change in passenger impressions.

As many of you know, during my **Summer By Rail** travels, I spent time in the Amtrak Test Kitchen sampling a portion of what is now the contemporary menu. There is obviously plenty to critique in regards to quality control on board and I do completely understand the frustrations of

those taking long trips expected to sustain on the lackluster entrees for multiple days.

The simple fact is, COVID or not, the execution here leaves much to be desired. There are ways to flash-freeze, dehydrate, can and preserve foods without insane amounts of salt. There are methods of updating point-of-sale (POS) on board and running better analytics. The cardboard box with a wad of foil on top is not what I saw in the

Test Kitchen and not what folks on board were promised.

A huge point of contention for me as a trained Chef is in fact the menu execution itself. **This is a crucial bit of feedback I want to illuminate after having ridden the City of New Orleans last summer pre-contemporary as well as this January post-contemporary.**

After a 5-hour host rail delay in scenic Greenwood, MS I was looking forward to finally seeing the sleek trays and reusable but modern plating of the contemporary menu in the wild. What I witnessed at the Test Kitchen versus what was served to me on board were so vastly

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different in the levels of execution I was immediately filled with both frustration and empathy. I had taken much of the anecdotal feedback I had received with a grain of salt, however that pales in comparison to the amount of sodium I ingested in that single sitting.

While there needs to be quality control on Amtrak's end, there is obviously a lack of quality control with the subcontracted providers they are using. Where is on-board service protocol enforcement? We need transparent metrics and protocols developed by qualified passenger advocates, on-board crew, and members of the F&B industry with relevant national catering logistics experience, not vague oversight from those stemming from the airline industry. In the post-COVID race to get folks on trains instead of planes, this airline-level food does not help our cause.

There is a fine line between providing things which are palatable and exciting and plates that are not overly bold or alienating to less-adventurous eaters. A balance of signature Amtrak items (French Toast, steak, chocolate cake, etc.) and a little life breathed into each menu would do wonders for new customers and create comfort for those returning. Each route should have its own menu with signature overlapping items. Anyone who has taken multiple long-distance trips last year can attest to the repetition of the menu becoming monotonous. How fun would it be to eat favorites that are a homage to the cities en-route?

A variety of grains, thick savory cuts of meat, fresh vegetables,



Photo Credit: Joe Aiello

and sauces that inspire can be created at a reasonable cost to both Amtrak and the passenger. This is not too much to expect. We should not be hung up on the fact that food is frozen but rather what is frozen and are there not other shelf-stable items we could be using in more efficient ways. A vast majority of the food consumed in this country is at some point frozen. The way it's cooked determines whether it tastes of TV dinner or fresh from the oven. Operating protocols for onboard preparation and standards still need to be uniform across the country regardless of menu.

There is missed opportunity in not playing up the novelty and excitement of rail travel in food presentation and menu execution. There is a perception of value lacking. Where there could be whimsy and nostalgia, there is instead a vacuum.

It takes some culinary background to create a menu that serves all, but not a challenge any qualified chef would balk at so long as the folks upstairs choose to hear the needs of their passengers,

constituents, and customers and make room for these changes to be possible. Playing into the thematics of the train itself by offering a menu with an influence representing the regions it traverses was one of the most highly regarded moves of Amtrak's culinary heyday. Why are we not paying homage to that now? In **last year's poll** of frequently travelling Amtrak regulars, over 77% of people said they did not want boxed meals and 92% agree all passengers regardless of class should have access to a sit-down meal.

To allow things to continue in their current state is not only

“A variety of grains, thick savory cuts of meat, fresh vegetables, and sauces that inspire can be created at a reasonable cost to both Amtrak and the passenger.”

detrimental to Amtrak reaching a break even again by FY 23, it will continue to deter ridership and render many services no longer competitive as a means of long-distance travel. If we want the National Network to be an attractive method of long-distance travel and the NEC to remain a relevant commuter service model, people have to be cared for better. The wow factor is lacking in ways that transcend taste alone. Again, customer retention requires us to look into the impact of the total experience and without clear analytics and measurable levels of customer satisfaction, any statements made about reduction of service or on board menu changes are speculative at best and counter productive at worst.

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With clear metrics created by a panel of invested participants whose qualifications and previous experience hold relevance to the task at hand and real commitment to chef-led in-kitchen R&D, the revival of a true on board experience is possible. The recipe is part logistics, part execution, part inspiration, part cost, part feasibility but it's nothing the right team can't cook up. Luckily, we are all on the same team and I will be sure that we have the platforms at hand to make it easy to make our collective voice heard.

When we look at food served on board and at stations throughout Europe and Asia, we often see healthy well balanced meals served in reusable or biodegradable containers yet still it is fresh food and of a better perceived quality than what we have.

The standards we need to meet can only be reached if Congress chooses to support what their

passenger constituents advocate for. That means we need to be reaching out to their offices en masse. We need to go for

come. It would be my honor to help champion this cause and I would be grateful to commit my time and skill set to help turn

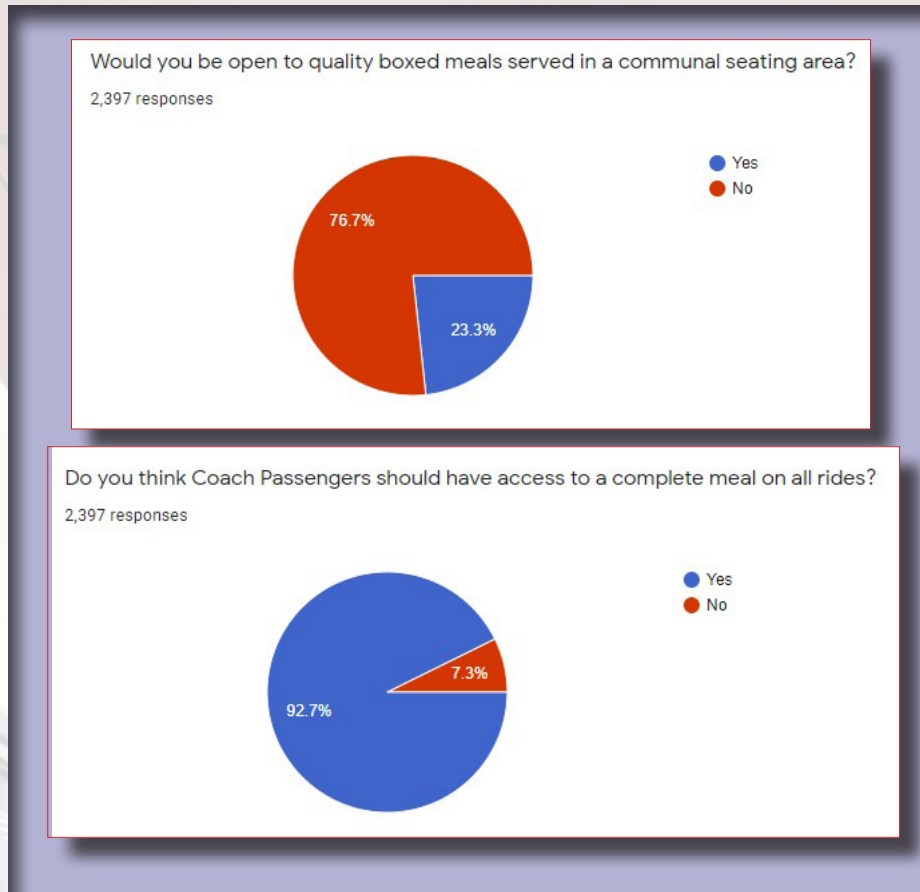
on-board dining into the kind of memorable experience so many rail enthusiasts embrace.

Passing the TRAINS Act and incorporating a complete dining overhaul not only secures the future of our rails, it honors our history. We need to push to update on-board technology while respecting the legacy we have been given. Over almost 50 years we have seen Amtrak F&B change and change again.

This time, let's create change the passenger supports.

With the radical transitions many industries are experiencing in their "new normal," there are simultaneously tight budgets and big room for drastic improvement.

If that isn't the quintessential Millennial's moment to shine, I don't know what is.



quantity, and draw attention in large numbers to this historic opportunity to forever improve dining service and free Amtrak F&B from Mica.

This is the time for our strategic collective voice to speak louder in supporting these developments we so desperately need for America's rail service to remain competitive in the times to

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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- Requires Amtrak to ensure that all long-distance passengers traveling overnight have access to hot meals, not just sleeping car passengers, and it removes statutory language limiting Amtrak's ability to provide food and beverage service due to costs.
- Revises Amtrak's official mission to reflect Congressional priorities that Amtrak must provide reliable national intercity passenger rail service now and, in the future, reflect the needs of all passenger and support the U.S. workforce.
- Clarifies that Amtrak serves the public interest in providing reliable passenger rail service and does not exist primarily to make a profit.
- Realigns the makeup of Amtrak's board of directors to better reflect the interests of passengers and Amtrak-served states, with a reserved seat for the National Network.
- Provides a means for Amtrak to enforce its statutory right of preference directly in Federal court without intermediaries, a move that will improve on-time performance for Amtrak trains.
- Establishes a streamlined process for the Board to determine whether running additional passenger trains really impair freight transportation and initiate a proceeding to evaluate the true cost of additional investments required to run those trains.
- Prohibits Amtrak from imposing mandatory arbitration on passengers.
- Increases transparency of the costs Amtrak assigns to states for state-supported routes and calls for procedures to improve financial planning.

APPROPRIATORS PASS BUDGET TO KEEP TRAINS RUNNING, LAUNCH NEW PROJECTS.

Recognizing that the funding was needed not next year but now, the House Committee on Appropriations

| Program | House FY21 THUD Funding Levels (\$M) |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Rail - FY21 | |
| Amtrak - National Network | 750 |
| Amtrak - Northeast Corridor | 1,300 |
| Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements | 500 |
| Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair | 200 |
| Magnetic Levitation Technology Deployment Program | 5 |
| Rail Subtotal | 2,755 |
| Transit - FY21 | |
| Formula Grants | 15,900 |
| Capital Investment Grants | 2,200 |
| Transit Infrastructure Grants | 510 |
| Transit Subtotal | 18,610 |
| BUILD Grants - FY21 | |
| Economic Recovery Funds - Rail and Transit | |
| Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements | 5,000 |
| Magnetic Levitation Technology Deployment Program | 100 |
| Amtrak - National Network | 5,000 |
| Amtrak - Northeast Corridor | 3,000 |
| FTA Capital Investment Grants | 5,000 |
| BUILD Grants | 3,000 |
| Economic Recovery Funds | \$21,100 |

picked up the baton from the House Transportation Committee by passing a Fiscal Year 2021 budget that provides \$10 billion for Amtrak and \$18.9 billion for transit as part of next year's budget. Critically, in recognition of the unprecedented financial strains on Amtrak and transit agencies resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, appropriators provided \$26 billion in funding for transportation projects to help the U.S. economy recover from what promises to be a lingering recession.

As part of the standard budgeting process, House

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VOLUNTEERISM & ADVOCACY: RAIL PASSENGERS STATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Rail stations have always served as community gateways where travelers begin and end their trips. Railroad stations have long been at the heart of America's communities and worked to uplift the community by incorporating visitor's centers, rail museums, event or office space that add value, generate revenue and serve as an essential connection to the community.

March 2020 found Rail Passengers' collaboration with Amtrak grow as we partnered to host stakeholder meetings, planned open house recruiting events and developed training sessions to welcome and coach vetted volunteers. Stations in East Lansing, MI and Fort Worth, TX were up and running and Lawrence, KS was well on its way. We were also on track to standing up volunteers in eight additional stations by year's end.

While the program is guided by best practices and defined protocols, its strength lies in its ability to be shaped to fit the nuances and needs of each station and its surrounding communities.

The East Lansing Capital Area Multimodal Gateway model is owned by Michigan State University, operated by the Capital Area Transportation Authority, unstaffed by Amtrak and the Blue Water state supported route serviced by the Michigan Department of Transportation. Members of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, MARP could not have been more helpful and showed up in force to support the program. The program went live October 11, 2019 with nine volunteers.

In January 2020 Amtrak issued its Q1 FY20 Customer Service Index (CSI) metrics for stations across the country. These scores are benchmarked against the Q1 FY19 scores to measure areas of improvement and needed improvement. The East Lansing station showed a 14.9% increase in Friendliness/Helpfulness of Station Personnel. This significant increase in customer scores is a direct result of the engagement

and hard work of the station volunteers. Since the station had been unstaffed of Amtrak personnel since October 1, 2018, the increase is a direct outcome of the station volunteers. Documented success!

The Fort Worth model is quite unique. The Fort Worth Central Station is owned and operated by Trinity Metro, staffed by Amtrak employees, services the Texas Eagle and Heartland Flyer trains as well as Trinity Metro buses, Trinity Railway Express and

TexRail Commuter Rails and Greyhound buses. Most importantly the station has hosted volunteers for the past ten years. Volunteer numbers had dwindled down to its last two remaining volunteers and in January 2020, we launched assistance to replenish their numbers. Rail Passengers members and rail advocates from across the state showed up and lent a hand in standing up this very vital extension of the station. For the past ten years, volunteers have safeguarded the riding public, promoted tourism into the city and supported the Amtrak employees working the station. Volunteers and employees can coexist quite well together. The program went live February 2020 with eight volunteers.



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(Photo Credit: Carolyn Cokley)

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The Santa Fe Depot in Lawrence, KS has a long history of volunteerism and community engagement. Lawrence is an unstaffed station owned and operated by the City of Lawrence who with strong community advocacy kicked off a decade long effort to renovate and revitalize the station which completed in 2017 and was rededicated in 2018. The Southwest Chief arrives at the station at 11:47 p.m. Westbound and 5:09 a.m. Eastbound so the challenge was to appeal to residents who would want to volunteer at these hours. The open house in February showed that it was not a problem at all. Residents and members alike came out to tour the new station and to sign up for volunteer shifts. Each train is met by contracted Caretaker(s) who are responsible for opening, closing and maintaining the station. Like in East Lansing we found that carefully defining the responsibilities of station volunteers created a mutually beneficial environment with the station Caretakers. The March 14 volunteer training was cancelled due to COVID-19 but will be rescheduled as soon as permitted.

The successful build out of each location demonstrates that volunteers can operate in a variety of station settings regardless of who owns and operates the station, regardless if the station is staffed or unstaffed by employees or caretakers and regardless of train arrival/departure times. What works is responsive, civic-minded residents with a passion to connect around passenger rail issues.

While the buy in from stakeholders has been crucial in standing up the program, the continued success of it falls to the men and women who sign up to volunteer their time and want to give back to their communities. A regular Volunteer Spotlight blog on our website will highlight who these wonderful men and women are, share their commitment to giving back and engage us all in the value of volunteerism.

The roll-out of the program is currently on hiatus due to COVID-19, but the important conversations with local governments, transit agencies, state DOTs and local rail advocates and associations continue to take place to move the program forward.

As the nation stretches out and begins to get back to train travel, volunteers can be a reassuring and reliable presence at any station. They can answer travelers' questions and quell any anxieties about what to expect aboard Amtrak trains and in Amtrak stations. Volunteers can also promote rail advocacy



(Photo Credit: Carolyn Cokley)

and convey local public health laws and protocols to the riding public while they practice those protocols themselves.

We are living in very interesting times and COVID-19 has changed the way we interact with each other and this includes our charitable views and positions. Not only have the priorities of our immediate households changed, the needs and priorities of the communities in which we live have changed as well. So many of our

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(Photo Credit: Carolyn Cokley)

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Name: Dr. Meredith Richards, 2020-21 Board of Directors

Where are you located? Charlottesville, VA

Why are you a Rail Passengers member?: America should be planning for and investing in a high-performing national network of intercity and commuter rail that integrates seamlessly with other transportation modalities. Rail should be as universal, accessible, and serviceable for travelers as the interstate highway system. While it may be a long time before government policy and travel choices support such a robust vision, Rail Passengers continues to achieve strategic gains for passenger rail across the nation.

While I have personally focused on broadening regional passenger rail for Virginia and the Southeast, I believe RPA must speak for all passengers and all regions as it works to improve

access to rail transportation for all Americans. I am an unequivocal supporter of Amtrak, yet I also see great potential in the private development of passenger railroads in highly-focused markets, such as Brightline and Texas Central HSR.

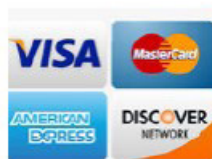
I believe that, with the help of an effective Board of Directors and the active field work of our Council of State Representatives, the Association can be a catalyst for urgently needed change in our nation's transportation priorities. By speaking for rail passengers, fighting for greater investment and sensible regulations, and mobilizing public support, RPA's work has already been proven as transformative. To that end, I will use my leadership experience, communication skills, policy expertise, and political savvy to help keep this work on track as a new member of the Board of Directors.

The "**Member Spotlight**" is a new monthly section where we highlight the Association's most important asset: YOU. To be considered, email Kim Williams at kwilliams@narpail.org.

Make donations and pay your membership dues



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Call our Main Office at [202] 408 - 8362



Mail to Rail Passengers Association
1200 G St NW Suite 240
Washington DC 20005

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neighbors lived on the fringes of our society before COVID-19 and those needs have been magnified since. If you want to do more to help your neighbors and advocate for those who are struggling to survive, pick a cause and see what happens.

Volunteer opportunities to improve your community are available everywhere. This can be activities offered through non-profit organizations, local governments and churches and even local recreational and professional

sports teams. Advocate for someone who has lost their voice to speak and the benefits you experience can be immeasurable. Do it safely, do it responsibly.

If you live in a community with an unstaffed/staffed train station and believe there is support for a station volunteer program, please reach out, volunteer@narpail.org. We would love to hear from you. The future of the program will build on our successes and the engagement of our members.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



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/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.

RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

QUESTION...

**SUMMER 2020:
WHAT DO YOU MOST LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING ON LONG DISTANCE TRIPS?**

A. The Sunrise

B. The Sunset

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 June, we asked: **Which is your favorite American train song?**

Out of the two options we kicked off the conversation with, Arlo Guthrie's "**City of New Orleans**" (84%) finished well ahead of Gladys Knight's "**Midnight Train to Georgia**" (16%)

You can click here <https://www.facebook.com/narprail/posts/10159689073713368> to view the poll and see some of the other songs people suggested.

Upcoming Events

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

Go to railpassengers.org/events for more information

**Wednesday, July 22, 2020,
3:00 PM**

**Rail Passengers National Briefing:
The INVEST In America Act**

**Tuesday, August 11 &
Wednesday, August 12th,
9:00 AM**

**Virtual Midwest Rail Conference 2020
(Two Day Event)**

**Wednesday, August 19, 2020
3:00 PM**

**Rail Passengers Regional Briefing:
The Sunset Limited Corridor**

**Wednesday, August 19, 2020,
3:00 PM**

**Montana Passenger Rail
Virtual Summit**

Please contact Bruce Becker 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!

VIEW FROM THE HILL, from p. 8

appropriators provided \$2 billion for Amtrak—an increase of \$50 million over FY2020—and \$18.9 billion for transit—an increase of \$6 billion over FY2020. However, given the financial hardship faced by these operators from losses in farebox revenue and reductions in revenue from state and local taxes, even this increase wouldn't have prevented severe reductions in service levels on intercity and transit systems across the U.S. Recognizing this, THUD appropriators provided an additional \$8 billion in emergency funding for Amtrak (\$5 billion for the NN and \$3 billion for the NEC) and \$5 billion for the Federal Transit Agency's Capital Investment Grants program.

As requested by members of Congress in partnership with Rail Passengers, House appropriators included service protections for both FY2021 and economic recovery funds. Mirroring language suggested by our association, lawmakers stipulated that "none of the funding in this bill is intended to be used by Amtrak to reduce the frequency of rail service on any long-distance route or State-supported route below frequencies for such routes in fiscal year 2019, except in an emergency, during maintenance or construction outages impacting such routes, or at the request of the

State(s) supporting such State-supported routes."

"Our nation is facing an infrastructure crisis, with crumbling roads, aging transit and rail systems, lack of affordable and safe housing, and natural disasters increasing in severity and number, exacerbated by accelerating climate changes," **said Chairman David Price (D-NC)**. "Meanwhile, COVID-19 is ravaging communities, revealing and deepening existing disparities, while leaving state and local governments with fewer resources and more responsibility to respond... The Fiscal Year 2021 'THUD' funding bill seeks to confront these problems head on."

House appropriators also approved an amendment requiring passengers and employees on Amtrak, large transit systems, and airlines to wear masks, and for those operators to provide frontline workers with face coverings, gloves and hand sanitizer.

NEXT STEPS

The Senate will now have to take up versions of both bills, with a September 30th deadline before current legislation runs out. Go to RailPassengers.org/Action to find out how you can support these revolutionary programs in the Senate and ensure they're part of the final law.

JOIN THE DIGITAL CONVERSATION:



**@RAILPASSENGERS
@NARPRAIL**



**STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH THE WEEKLY HOTLINE!
DELIVERED EVERY FRIDAY STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX.**

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.**
- If you'd like to change your membership level and the payment associated with it, please contact our office at 202-408-8362, ext. 3123 instead of contacting your financial institution for a chargeback. We can cancel or refund the payment. By working through your bank, Rail Passengers could be assessed fees. We are happy to assist you with your membership needs.



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