



March 18, 2022

**TO: Interested Parties**

**FR: Ben Greenfield, Change Research**

**RE: Large Majority of Americans Want To Invest In A Stronger Passenger Rail System**

A large majority of Americans want the country to have a stronger passenger rail system, and want Congress to increase rail funding to invest in the country’s rail network. These findings come from a new survey of 1,280 registered voters nationwide. While Americans generally feel positive about rail service both near them and around the country, they have some concerns around issues of service and convenience -- both of which could be alleviated by increased funding. What’s more, many voters are unaware of some basic facts about our passenger rail system, and when they read messages communicating some of these facts, their support for more funding increases substantially.

**78% Say It’s Important for the Country to Have a Strong Passenger Rail System**

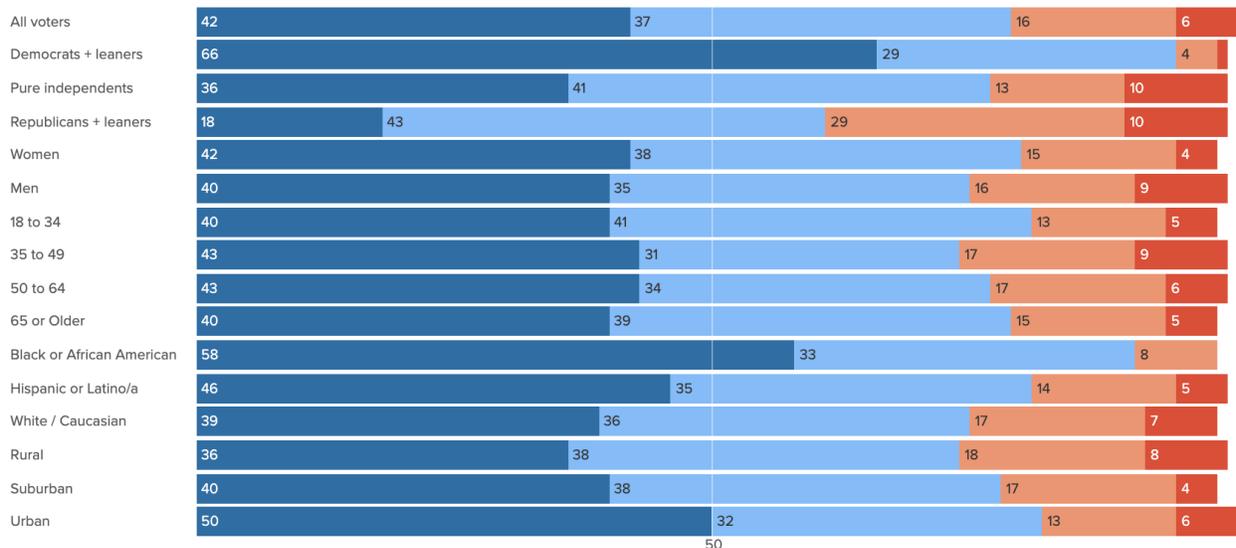
Voters across the board believe that it’s important for the country to have a strong passenger rail system: large majorities of each demographic, partisan, and geographic group say so. Though Republicans are significantly more likely to say it’s “somewhat important” than “very important,” over 60% of Republicans do believe a strong rail system is important.

**Importance of a strong national passenger rail system**

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"In your opinion, how important is it for America to have a strong passenger rail system?"

● Very important ● Somewhat important ● Not very important ● Not at all important



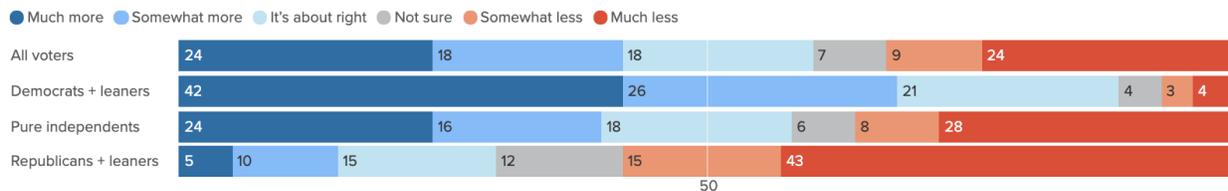
## 60% Say Infrastructure Bill Should Contain At Least \$100B For Passenger Rail

42% say the bill should contain more than \$100B -- including 24% who say it should contain much more -- while 18% say that \$100B is about right. Only 32% think there should be less than \$100B. And while there is a significant partisan divide on this question, we see that even among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, only 58% think there should be less funding.

### Support for \$100B in rail funding in infrastructure bill (initial)

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"As part of the infrastructure bill being considered in Washington, about \$100 billion goes to passenger rail over five years -- about one-third as much as the \$300 billion over five years that goes to highways. The rail funding will largely go to track improvements, safety, new trains, and new and renovated corridors, but not to priorities like building out high-speed rail or investing in the electrification of rail lines. Given this information, do you think the infrastructure bill should include more or less investment in passenger rail?"



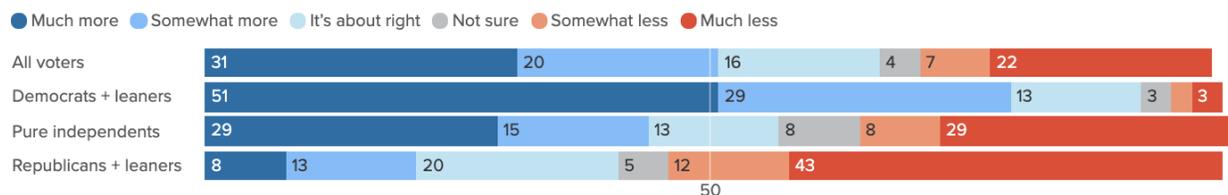
Later in the survey, we asked a broader question about whether Congress should put more funding towards passenger rail services more generally, and the numbers were similar: 61% would support this, while 30% would oppose.

After respondents were shown a few arguments in favor of more investment in passenger rail (detailed below), they were asked again about the infrastructure bill funding -- and we find that 67% favor at least \$100B, with increased support among both Democrats and Republicans.

### Support for \$100B in rail funding in infrastructure bill (post-messaging)

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After everything you've read, do you think the infrastructure bill should include more or less investment in passenger rail?

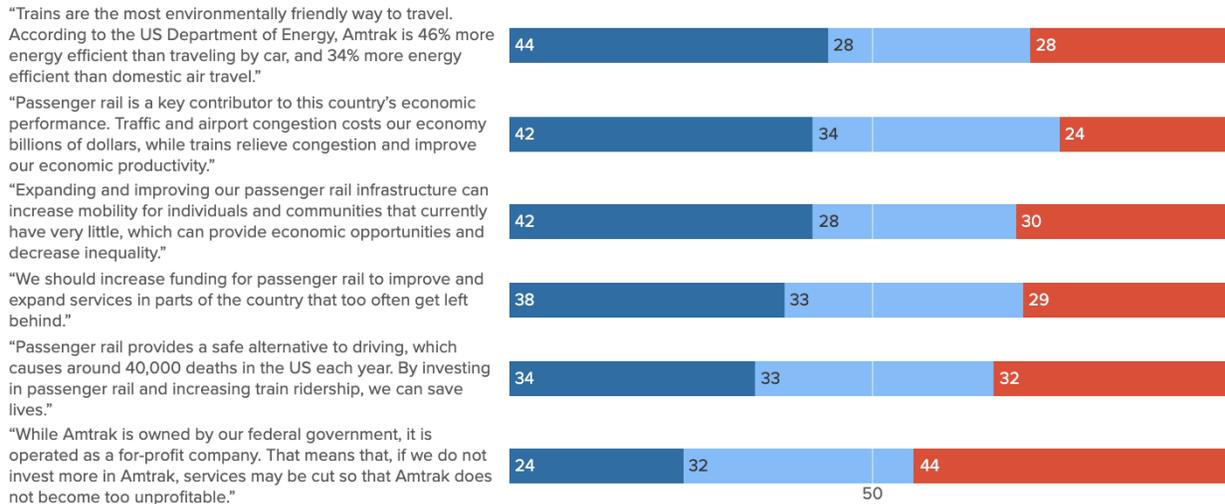


## Environmental, Economic, Mobility Benefits Increase Support for Investment

We tested 6 messages in support of increased investments for passenger rail. Three performed similarly well:

- One about trains being environmentally friendly
- One about trains contributing to the economy, by relieving congestion while traffic and airports increase congestion
- One about increasing mobility for individuals and communities that have too little

● Very convincing reason to support greater investment in passenger rail ● Somewhat convincing reason to support greater investment in passenger rail  
 ● Not convincing reason to support greater investment in passenger rail



The message about expanding service to parts of the country that often get left behind performed only decently. Notably, it did not resonate significantly more with those in rural areas, or in areas of the country with less train service, than among those in more densely populated areas with more train lines.

Two messages did less well:

- One about rail being a safe option
- One about avoiding service cuts that would result from Amtrak operating as a for-profit company

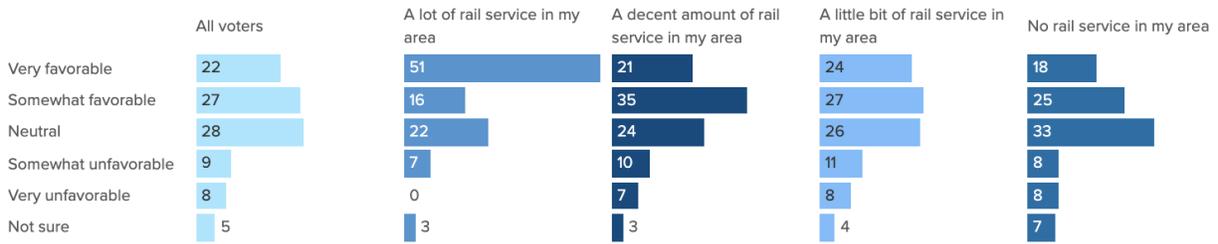
Following all of these messages, respondents were again asked whether they wanted to see more or less investment in passenger rail in the infrastructure bill, and 51% said more, 29% less -- a net increase of 12 percentage points in favor of more investment.

**Americans Feel Favorable About Rail -- Especially If Service Is Good Near Them**

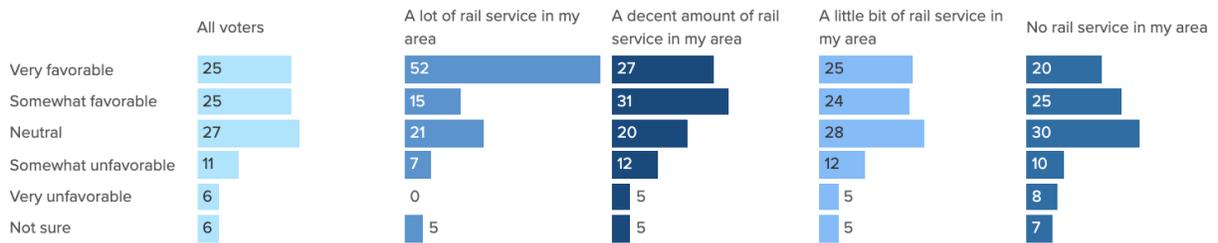
Americans feel similarly about Amtrak & intercity rail and passenger rail & rail transit: 49% feel favorable toward both, while only 17% feel unfavorable, and the remaining 33% were neutral or unsure. Those with a lot of rail service in their area felt much more positive than those with less service. On the other hand, the differences between those who say they had a “decent amount” of rail service in their area and those with little to no service were relatively small.

## Favorability: Amtrak/Intercity Rail & Commuter Rail/Rail Transit

Generally speaking, how favorable are your feelings about each of the following in this country? - Amtrak & intercity rail

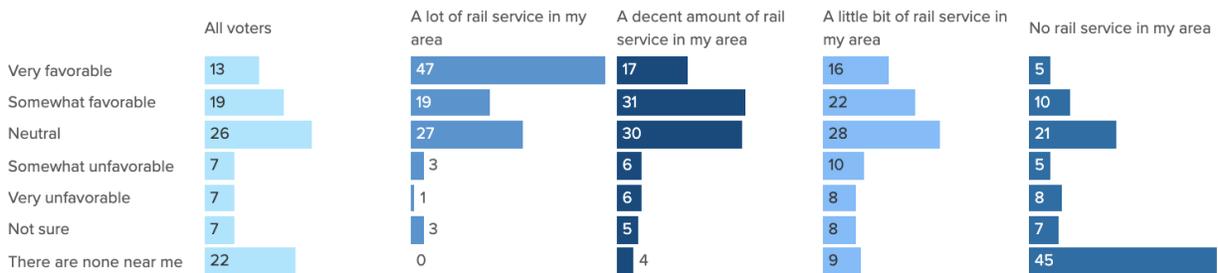


Generally speaking, how favorable are your feelings about each of the following in this country? - Commuter rail and rail transit

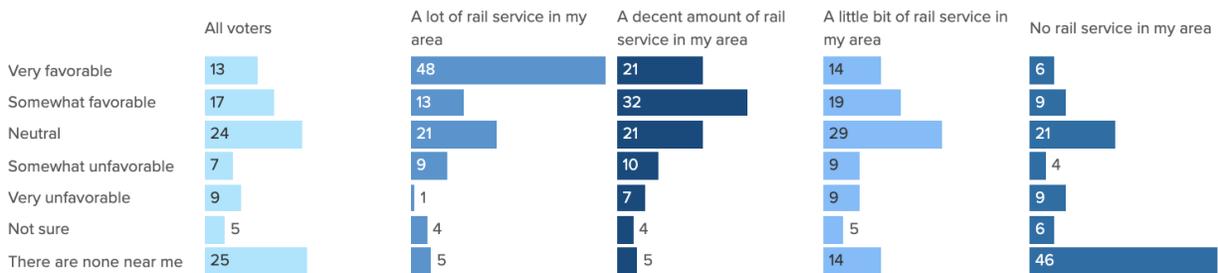


When we asked about the lines *nearest to you*, we found that the overall favorability number, 32%, was lower than on the nationwide question, owing largely to those who say that they simply don't have train lines near them. In other words, this again shows that many of those who have no lines near them nonetheless feel positive about the nationwide system.

And for each of the following, how favorable are your feelings about the lines *nearest to you*? - Amtrak & intercity rail



And for each of the following, how favorable are your feelings about the lines *nearest to you*? - Commuter rail and rail transit



Those who said they felt unfavorable about Amtrak and intercity rail were asked why, and the main reasons were expense and inconvenience:

- 24% said they were too expensive
- 17% said it didn't go where they needed to go
- 15% said there were no stops near them
- 11% said it was too slow
- 8% said there were too many delays.

If these problems were solved, 39% of those who initially felt unfavorable said they'd feel favorable about Amtrak and intercity rail; 36% would still feel unfavorable, and the rest would be neutral or aren't sure how they'd feel.

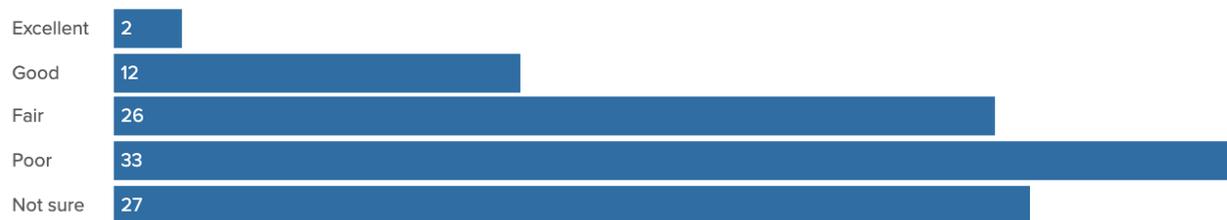
## Americans Want To Make Investments To Improve The Nation's Passenger Rail Network

Despite Americans' generally favorable feelings towards rail, most rate the country's passenger rail network as fair or poor:

### Quality of passenger rail network

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"How would you rate the quality of the U.S. passenger rail network?"

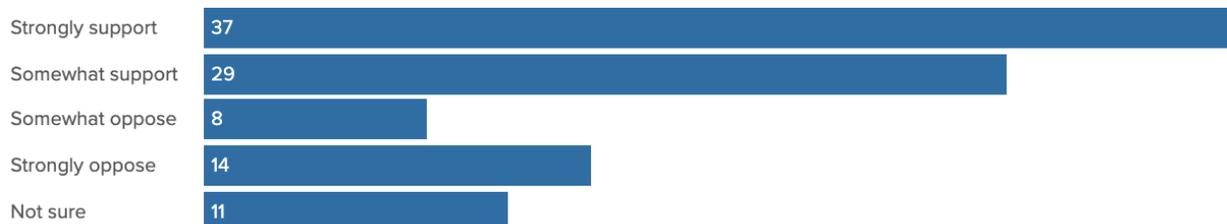


But people want to make the investments to improve that network: 66% support adding more lines to the existing passenger rail network (including 37% who strongly support it). And as mentioned, 61% support Congress putting more funding toward passenger rail services.

### Support for adding lines to passenger rail network

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Would you support or oppose adding more lines to the existing passenger rail network in the U.S.?



## Other findings:

- Only 6% ride trains at least once a month. Among urban respondents, 14% do. And overall, 25% say they do ride trains, but less than once a month. Still, though, that leaves 69% of all voters nationwide who never ride trains. Those who never ride trains still want to see more train service: for example, 57% of them would support Congress increasing funding for passenger rail.
- Vacation is by far the most common reason people take trains. 59% of those who ever take trains say they do so for vacation. "Daily activities," "business trips," and "work commute" were selected by 21%, 18%, and 13%, respectively.
- Among those who do not take trains, by far the most common reason is that there's not enough train service near them or where they're going: 60% chose this; 8% said it takes too long, and 2% said it's too expensive. Of those 60%, just over two-thirds -- 68% -- said they would take passenger rail if there were stops near them.
- Americans' favorite aspects of trains are 1) that they don't have to drive, 2) scenery, and 3) ability to work or read. 56% said that the fact that it's not driving was something they liked about trains; 48-49% each said scenery and the ability to work or read.
- But people strongly prefer driving (and flying). 57% prefer driving to taking a train, while 23% prefer the train. Flying is closer: 45% prefer flying, 32% trains (though 35% of those who initially said they prefer flying said they prefer trains when it's cheaper).
- Separately, we asked people how much they like or dislike each mode of transportation. 50% like or love trains, while 11% dislike or hate them. This is roughly in line with planes (53% / 23%). It's significantly lower than cars (84% / 5%), but much higher than bikes (37% / 24%) and buses (18% / 51%).
- 66% support a national railroad plan. Only 26% are opposed. And support is similar for a national high speed rail plan: 66% support, 27% opposition.
- 57% would use HSR if it existed in their area. Just 23% said they would not; the other 20% aren't sure. The numbers are lower among those who currently never take trains -- 48% Yes, 29% No.
- People see the biggest benefits of frequent, reliable, affordable intercity rail service as reducing traffic and providing mobility. We asked respondents to rank 5 potential benefits. 41% ranked traffic reduction #1 -- much higher than mobility (27%) or safety (26%). Mobility was the #2 choice of 31%, while only 16% ranked safety 2nd. Tourism and increased economic development around stations were seen as much less important.
- 64% think tax dollars should pay for the upkeep of tracks and trains. 25% think they shouldn't. Though this is far lower than the 94% who say tax dollars should fund the

upkeep of roads, highways and bridges, it's similar to the 69% who say taxes should fund the air traffic control system, and more positive than the 47% who say they should fund airport operations.

- Only 27% think Amtrak should be expected to make a profit for the government. 61% think it should not. While these numbers aren't in line with what we see on roads and highways (8% Yes, 84% No), it's still a significant majority that do not think of Amtrak as an entity that needs to generate profits.
- Trains are typically seen as the 2nd most environmentally friendly mode of transportation, behind bikes. 88% rank bikes as the most environmentally friendly. 57% rank rail #1 or #2. Planes are seen as slightly less environmentally friendly than boats and cars, but those three are seen as the 3 clear least environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

*A complete methodology statement can be found [here](#).*