



PASSENGERS Voice

APRIL 2020 | VOL. 54, NO. 4

RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION FISCAL YEAR 2021 LEGISLATIVE GRANT REQUEST

"Undaunted by the postponement of in-person meetings due to the coronavirus outbreak, hundreds of Rail Passengers Association members called on Congress to increase support for passengers during a virtual version of our annual Rail Passengers Day on the Hill."

With a record 32.5 million Amtrak passengers carried in 2019, a record 499 million passenger trips for commuter rail, and rail transit systems struggling to deal with the number of passengers, we felt we were in a good place to ask for a surge in investment.

Below are the specific proposals we delivered to hundreds of offices, and which will help deliver modern, efficient, and frequent passenger to millions of Americans.

Transit + Innovative Infrastructure Financing

- **Transit Formula Grants:** U.S. transit systems face \$86 billion in deferred maintenance and replacement needs, with 25% of rail transit assets in marginal or poor condition. Rail Passengers is asking Congress to match FAST Act authorized funding levels

of \$11.4 billion for transit formula grants in Fiscal 2021.

- **Capital Investment Grants:** While state of good repair is critical, a growing U.S.

for the WMATA system in Fiscal 2021.

BUILD Grants: Rail Passengers asks Congress to match its Fiscal 2020 funding levels of

Federal Rail Funding (In Millions)		
Program	FY2020 Appropriated Levels	Rail Passengers Proposal
Amtrak - National Network	\$1,300.0	\$1,326.0
Amtrak - Corridor Dev. Program	N/A	\$300.0
Amtrak - NEC	\$700.0	\$714.0
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Grants	\$325.0	\$375.0
Federal State Partnership For State Of Good Repair	\$200.0	\$250.0
Restoration & Enhancement Grants	\$2.0	\$50.0
Total	\$2,527.0	\$3,015.0

population is resettling along dense metropolitan corridors. Rail Passengers is asking Congress to provide at least \$3.8 billion for the New Starts program in Fiscal 2021.

- **WMATA Transit Grants:** With state and local governments showing greater commitment to WMATA—including Virginia’s recent pledge of dedicated funding—it’s crucial that Congress match its Fiscal 2020 funding of \$150 million

\$1.5 billion for the BUILD/TIGER Grants program for Fiscal 2021, and mandate that the U.S. DOT direct at least 2/3rds of the grants towards projects in high-capacity corridors.

Equipment

With the Fiscal 2020 funding boost, Congress has given Amtrak and the States a mandate to continue work on modernizing the U.S. rail fleet. Amtrak is well into the procurement



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process for the new Northeast Corridor fleet (ACELA 2021); safer, more energy-efficient next-generation diesel locomotives to replace the aging National Network locomotive fleet; and has issued a Request for Proposals for new single-level equipment to replace Amfleet I cars on the Northeast Corridor and neighboring State-Supported services. However, there is still a long way to go towards fleet modernization. Rail Passengers is asking Congress to work with States and Amtrak to establish a stable funding mechanism to allow for critical investments in equipment that will meet public demand for reliable, energy-efficient equipment with modern amenities. In particular, we encourage the full funding of Amtrak's \$577 million grant request

for new equipment for the National Network and \$214 million grant request for new equipment for the NEC.

Legislative Proposals

Enshrine National Network Service:

Recognize the importance of on-time performance to the long-term viability of the National Network as a guiding principle for passenger rail investment in the surface transportation authorizing law; require Amtrak to provide train frequencies not less than what is currently being offered to all existing Amtrak communities.

Rail Passenger Fairness Act (S.2922):

Given the dramatic rise in host railroad interference and passenger delays, Rail Passengers is asking Congress to grant Amtrak a Private Right of Action to enforce existing law's dispatching preference.

Food & Beverage Reform Act:

Reforms Congressional oversight of food and beverage on Amtrak trains by eliminating onerous provisions threatening the stability of National Network service.

Increase Amtrak Transparency and Oversight:

Given the dramatic increase in Amtrak investment, we believe there is a greater need for transparency in Amtrak decision-making in its relationship with states and in its network planning. We request Amtrak report route financial performance on the basis of Avoidable Costs and increase transparency in the attribution of costs for state-supported service.

Invest in American Railroads Act (H.R.5947):

Reforms RRIF oversight and provides \$300 million per year in credit risk

premiums, with \$100 million set aside for passenger rail projects.

Ending Passenger Rail Forced Arbitration Act:

Restores legal rights and protections to Amtrak passengers who, as of last year, are currently being forced into mandatory arbitration agreement when purchasing tickets.

Warren Cowles Grade Crossing Safety Act:

Establishes a new grant program within CRISI to upgrade highway-rail grade crossing for commuter railroads and operators in high-ridership corridors, providing an additional \$250 million per year.

Provide increased funding in the surface transportation reauthorization for passenger rail:

There are several competing and complementary bills circulating; Rail Passengers is currently endorsing one Senate and one House proposal and believes that a satisfactory compromise can be reached through the reconciliation process.

We support the **High Speed Rail Corridor Development Act of 2020 (H.R.5805)**, which provides \$8 billion per year for the high-speed rail corridor development program, prioritizing corridors with higher non-Federal shares; the **Building Rail Across Intercity Networks To Ride Around Interior of the Nation (BRAIN TRAIN) Act**, which establishes a new grant program, providing \$5 billion per year over five years to fund new passenger rail corridors, including projects outside of the 11 federally designated high-speed rail corridors; and the Amtrak Corridor Development Program, which creates a \$300 million per year program to launch new Amtrak state-supported services, funding the initial infrastructure costs and help states cover operating costs for the first five years.

RAIL PASSENGERS VIRTUAL DAY ON THE HILL



RAIL PASSENGERS PUSH AHEAD WITH “VIRTUAL” CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY DAY

In response to travel restrictions and prohibitions against large groups due to COVID-19, the Rail Passengers Association was forced to delay our annual spring Advocacy Summit, scheduled to take place on March 30 – April 1. However, with legislative gears still rapidly turning in Washington, D.C., staff kept working with Congressional offices and our allied groups to advocate for a bigger and better passenger rail system. With legislative deadlines unaltered, we decided the best way forward was to continue with our Passenger Rail Day on the Hill on March 31st—transitioning it to a “Virtual” Day on the Hill.

On March 8th, with new coronavirus cases popping up across the nation, Rail Passengers leadership decided that the safest thing for our members was to delay the spring meeting until late June. “Nonprofit organizations have a special responsibility to be good stewards of their resources,

and that’s doubly true for a membership organization whose resources come from all of you,” wrote CEO Jim Mathews. “But the

called their elected officials in Washington—or even met with staffers at local district offices—to ask for more investment in passenger trains.

What Congress Needs To Hear

Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations:

House and Senate appropriators are currently considering spending levels for Amtrak, passenger rail grant programs, and transit. It’s important that they hear from passengers about the pressing needs of Amtrak and transit systems.

Surface Transportation Reauthorization Blueprint:

Congress is drafting a bill that will control passenger rail funding and policy over the next five years, and shape the passenger rail network for decades.

Infrastructure/Stimulus Bill:

With a flagging economy, leaders in both the Senate and the House are discussing using an infrastructure bill to revitalize our economy, and we need to make sure rail is part of the conversation. This will be even more important with news coming that travelers across the country are canceling their travel plans, causing a sharp drop in Amtrak and airline revenues.

Even if you missed the March 31st Virtual Day on the Hill, it’s not too late to take part in our campaign! We want you to call your elected officials and tell them:

With a record 32.5 million Amtrak passengers carried in 2019, I’m asking you to continue funding rail transportation at or above the levels provided last year. Please fund Amtrak at \$3.015 billion in FY2021 appropriations bill.

single most important resource we have is our members themselves -- our hardworking volunteer citizen-advocates who attend public meetings, speak to local officials, and work on our mission in their communities.”

And our members stepped up! Thousands of members responded to our calls and

You can read more about our legislative plan in “Rail Passengers Deliver Legislative Requests to Congress.” Go to RailPassengers.org/FY2021 for an advocacy packet that will give you everything you need for a quick, effective interaction with your Representative and Senators.

DOT SLATES \$284M IN INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

A few important passenger-rail projects found their way into the U.S. Dept. of Transportation's latest round of grants under the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program, including some funds earmarked to help pay for a study on extending the Southwest Chief to Colorado Springs.



DOT Secretary Elaine L. Chao announced all the CRISI recipients in March, unveiling grants to fund 32 projects in 27 states – a majority of them in rural areas.

The Federal Railroad Administration will administer the grants, which all come from Fiscal 2019 appropriations.

Rail Passengers and members of Congress have

faulted DOT for its recent tardiness in dispersing grant funds under several programs. The Fiscal 2020 appropriations measure directed DOT to announce its delayed grants before May 1, 2020.

Projects getting grants include:

- Up to \$17.49M for Windsor Locks Station improvements in Connecticut
- \$225K to support a study of extending the Southwest Chief to Colorado Springs
- Up to \$16.86M for a new platform and pedestrian bridge in Wells, ME
- Up to \$26.6M for a Muskego Yard Bypass in Wisconsin

"After disappointing delays, it's good to see so many worthy projects finally get grant funding from the available Fiscal 2019 funds," said Rail Passengers CEO Jim Mathews. "Congress has made it clear that it will not tolerate further delays, so we're confident that many more worthy projects will also begin to be funded more quickly."

The ENO Transportation Center noted, and Rail Passengers agrees, that this round of CRISI grants does not appear to have any projects funded related to Positive Train Control, even though there remain systems that are behind schedule in getting PTC in place and operating.

To read the full press release & see the entire list of projects, please go to <https://railroads.dot.gov/newsroom/press-releases>

EVENTS CANCELLATION/POSTPONEMENTS DUE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Upcoming Events | go to railpassengers.org/events for more information

Due to the current situation with the **COVID-19 outbreak**, many meetings around the country are being postponed and rescheduled for later dates. Please check our events page for updates and information.

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!

RAIL PASSENGERS STATEMENT ON NEW AMTRAK CEO

Amtrak named William Flynn as its next President and Chief Executive Officer, succeeding current CEO Richard Anderson. Flynn most recently headed Atlas Air Worldwide Holdings, Inc., and has held senior roles with CSX Transportation and other transportation companies.

Flynn will assume his Amtrak duties on April 15, 2020, with Anderson staying on as a senior advisor to Flynn through the end of the year much as former Norfolk Southern chief Wick Moorman eased Anderson's transition to Amtrak before him.

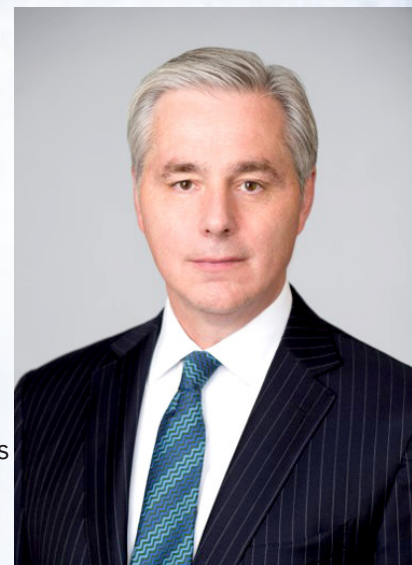
Amtrak is entering an important period for the company and for American passenger rail. Several mission-critical projects are waiting to begin construction, and Congress right now is in the process of drafting the next surface transportation reauthorization -- the transportation blueprint for the country for the next five years.

"Amtrak has just released an exciting budget request to Congress that outlines a vision for growth across its network, and we pledge to work with Mr. Flynn to ensure that Congress provides the funds Amtrak needs to provide modern, efficient passenger train service to all Americans," said Jim Mathews, President & CEO of Rail Passengers. "Over our

association's 50-plus years we've enjoyed productive relationships with Amtrak's leadership, and we look forward to continuing that tradition with Mr. Flynn."

Mathews also invited Flynn to take full advantage of Amtrak's National Network to see the incredible diversity in the backgrounds of his customers, and to get a close-up look at the unique challenges and opportunities in the more than 500 communities the railroad serves.

Rail Passengers has shared with Flynn an overview of the highlights from Amtrak's FY2021 budget request, including funding for the Hudson River Tunnel project, new equipment for the National Network, a program for launching new state-supported services, and protections for Amtrak passengers suffering from freight-caused delays.



(Photo Credit: AMTRAK)

RAIL PASSENGERS TAKING PART AS REGIONAL RAIL STUDIES RESUME

After nearly two years lying dormant, work is resuming on two Federal Railroad Administration studies in which Rail Passengers is taking an active role – the Southeast Regional Rail Planning Study and the Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study.

Rail Passengers CEO Jim Mathews took part in two separate study briefings to review preliminary results. FRA wants participants to supply additional inputs to the Southeast plan by April 10th and is scheduling additional work sessions later this year on the Midwest study. The coronavirus outbreak forced those briefings online.

A significant change for Phase II of both studies will sharply lower ridership and passenger estimates for the later years of the networks as they're

implemented, but the good news is that even with the lower estimates the networks still appear to more than cover their operating costs.

Phase II will look at these networks in more detail using the adjusted figures to determine whether the network concepts have to change. Rail Passengers will be part of this work.

Analysts developing the study models drastically reduced the growth in the overall number of auto trips projected by the year 2055 in a crucial study tool called CONNECT, and that in turn reduced the number of trips that could be shifted to rail in the models. The tool works by shifting some baseline trips to other modes based on a combination of price, distance and other

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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.

RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

QUESTION...

DID YOU HAVE TO CANCEL A TRIP DUE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?



A. Yes - Yes, it's better to safe than sorry.

B. No - No, I need to travel and I'll take the chances.

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 March, we asked: **President Trump has once again proposed eliminating Amtrak's long-distance trains in the FY2021 White House budget. How seriously do you think passengers should take this threat?**

An overwhelming **79%** said that we should take the threat "**very seriously**" while only **21%** said that it's not serious and "**Congress will do its job**".

Poll comments included:

- **Bob Greeley** commented that "I think it's up to us to keep the service alive, even if, God forbid, it doesn't make a profit. So not just train lovers (like me) but anyone who doesn't want to get stuck driving, flying or riding a bus on their next trip."

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Name: Charles B. Dew
Location: Williamstown, MA
Member Since: 1977

What does RPA mean to you?: I joined what was then the National Association of Railroad Passengers when a teaching colleague at Williams College learned of my love of rail travel. Since I am a historian of the American South and often had to travel long distances to do archival research, it was critical for me to arrive at my destination rested and refreshed, and he suggested I support the one group that was working to preserve passenger trains in this country.

Amtrak was (and indeed remains) a political football

that some Congressmen and Senators never seemed to tire of kicking around (I recall one who called it a "Soviet-style railroad," whatever that meant), so I signed up, paid my dues, and have been doing so ever since.

I have never doubted that this was money well spent. Indeed, without the splendid work over the years of the NARP/RPA staff, a "lean, mean, fighting machine" if ever there was one, I think we would have lost passenger rail service in this country. If that had happened, I am certain that the scholarship I have been fortunate enough to publish over the years would never have been written. So the debt I owe to our organization is a major one, one that I am glad to honor and do my best annually to repay.

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@narprail.org.

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.



STUDIES, from p. 5

factors. Even so, an initial model run suggests that a notional Southeast and Interregional Network could generate an operating cost recovery ratio of 1.82 by 2055, carrying some 39 million passengers on a mix of trains operating at more than 125 mph and at 90-125

mph on dedicated right-of-way and more conventional services of up to 90 mph on shared track.

<https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/planning/regional-rail-planning>

MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND NOTICES

- If you have received a renewal letter and have already sent in a payment, please disregard the letter. We will update your account as soon as we can! We appreciate your payment.
- If you renew your membership by mail, please be sure to send a membership renewal form with your payment! We will update your membership status only if you return a form to RENEW your membership. Forms asking you to DONATE are processed as general donations, not membership dues.

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