



RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

# PASSENGERS Voice

DECEMBER 2018 | VOL. 52, NO. 11

## 2018 PASSENGER ADVOCACY: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2018 was a big year for rail advocacy, with new challenges, critical victories, and everything in-between. The past 12 months have seen the Rail Passengers Association—professional staff, volunteer leadership, and rank and file members—battle with Amtrak’s new executives, secure an influx of new federal funding, and remember the loss of dear friends.

### JANUARY:

- A great start, as the Justice Department (DOJ) recognized Congress’ mandate to create on-time train standards, backing long-standing concepts Rail Passengers outlined in multiple judicial briefs. DOJ acknowledged that competing court cases brought by freight railroads eviscerated the power to create those standards, while agreeing with RPA’s position that the issue could be set aside for the Supreme Court to potentially consider after related cases are heard—an important step clearing the way for future litigation.

### FEBRUARY:

- RPA responded vigorously when the White House proposed to gut Amtrak’s long-distance services by cutting \$757 million from the annual Amtrak grant, organizing members to successfully stave

off draconian cuts to vital National Network services, instead securing increases. Meanwhile, RPA hit back at statements made by Amtrak and Senators in Congressional hearings over delays to the implementation of Positive Train Control, and RPA was able to extract Amtrak’s promise not to eliminate any train service in 2019 due to PTC requirements.

### MARCH:

- RPA advocates secured more funding for Amtrak, passenger rail, and transit as part of the Fiscal Year 2018 budget, a long-awaited and hard-fought victory. The bill included \$2.813 billion for intercity rail—an increase of \$1.3 billion over last year -- plus additional grants targeting PTC and Gulf Coast restoration. RPA also filed with the Surface Transportation Board to protest Canadian National’s unfair dispatching practices on behalf of our members who suffer from late trains as a result.

### APRIL:

- RPA recognized Jim Hamre’s life and memory by posthumously awarding him the Association’s Golden Spike Award at our Congressional Reception, joined by several members of the Washington State congressional delegation. An

RPA Board member and VP at All Aboard Washington, Hamre spent four decades working to improve and increase passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest. He was killed December 2017 in the Amtrak Train 501 derailment.

### MAY:

- In response to Amtrak’s new management making several service-level decisions that left in doubt its commitment to the National Network, RPA launched a broad-based national campaign to support a robust U.S. rail system, with a special focus on securing the Southwest Chief. RPA also kicked off the third annual Summer by Rail journey, with a route that ran 6,000 miles from Miami, FL to Seattle, WA. This year’s Summer by Rail correspondent, Jacob Wallace, visited 19 different Major, Minor

**REVIEW**, p. 2

“With Virgin Trains USA entry into the U.S. market via Brightline all of a sudden great Intercity corridor passenger rail service starts to look brighter (pun intended).”

Peter LeCody, RPA Chairman



# RAIL PASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

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1200 G Street, NW, Suite 240  
Washington, DC 20005-3818

202-408-8362 / 202-408-8287 (fax)

[www.railpassengers.org](http://www.railpassengers.org) • [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org)

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Bruce B. Becker (Ext. 3202), Vice Pres., Operations

James Abram Zumwalt (Ext. 3123), Dir. Policy Research

Carolyn Cokley (Ext. 3203), Dir. Customer Advisory Programs

Samantha Brown (Ext. 3208), Office Manager

Alicia Guinn (Ext. 3205), Executive Assistant

To The President

Joseph Aiello (Ext. 3210), Northeast Field Coordinator

Donna Thomas, Production Editor

This issue has news through November 16, 2018.

Vol. 52, No. 11 was mailed November 29, 2018.

## QUESTION...

**Should the U.S. create more government incentives for private-developed train services like Brightline?**

Yes/No

**A. Yes** - where it makes sense it can only add to our travel choices.

**B. No** - because it might lead to less-profitable communities getting no service at all.

Click here to submit your answer to this poll on social media, or send in your response via email to [survey@narprail.org](mailto:survey@narprail.org)

## REVIEW, from p.1

and Independent league stadiums in the U.S. and Canada over 37 days. Relying on public transit and passenger rail to explore how North America's transportation infrastructure can connect people with one of the oldest summer pastimes, Wallace spread our message of A Connected America to an estimated 26 million Americans.

## JUNE

- RPA awarded third-year medical student Steve Grado Jr. a \$10,000 scholarship. The University of Mississippi Medical Center student entered into an education sweepstakes hosted by RPA as part of our effort to recruit the next generation of passenger advocates.

## JULY

- The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit ruled in favor of passenger rail service by allowing Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to set their own standards for measuring passenger rail service on time performance. The decision vindicated RPA's position in numerous court filings, briefs and letters to regulators over the years, setting the stage for Amtrak and the FRA to work together to restore on-time performance standards vacated by previous rulings.

## AUGUST

- RPA issued a white paper confronting Amtrak over its use of allocated costs rather than avoidable costs—as required by statute—arguing that misleading costs have distorted the debate over the future of interstate rail corridors. RPA's paper argued that using fully allocated costs bolsters the widespread and incorrect perception that Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is financially self-sufficient and that Amtrak's need for taxpayer funding results entirely from its operation of passenger trains on the National Network. Also in August, RPA worked with Congress to secure \$2.5 billion for passenger rail in FY2019, \$16.1 billion for transit, and an amendment that prohibits Amtrak from replacing the Southwest Chief with bus service. RPA was also able to secure the following critical language in the Senate bill: "It is the sense of Congress that 1) long-distance passenger rail routes provide much-needed transportation access for 4,700,000 riders in 325 communities in 40 States and are particularly important in rural areas; and 2) long-distance passenger rail routes and services should be sustained to ensure connectivity throughout the National Network"

## OCTOBER

- In a huge win, RPA worked with Senators representing Southwest Chief states to force Amtrak to confirm in a Senate Commerce subcommittee hearing that it will continue to operate train service on the Southwest Chief route. Also in October, RPA President and CEO Jim Mathews debated the Cato Institute's Randall O'Toole, making the case for passenger rail as an essential component of a 21st century transportation network and economy.

## NOVEMBER

- RPA responded to Amtrak's decision to remove staff from 15 stations nationwide by launching our Station Volunteer Program, pulling together local volunteers to provide the kind of assistance previously provided by station agents. A kick-off event took place in early November in Niles, MI.

## RPA DEVELOPING AMTRAK FLEET-REPLACEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

With only a few of the equipment-replacement programs identified in Amtrak's 2012 Fleet Strategy actually underway, the Rail Passengers Association is concerned that the rest of the Amtrak fleet continues to age with no immediate plan for replacement.

The railroad's six-year-old strategy included comprehensive plans for initial replacement and continuing replacement, to keep average fleet age constant. But to date, only three procurement programs are formally in place: 70 ACS64 locomotives, 130 Midwest and California Single Level cars, and 28 Avela sets to replace the Acela. In addition, there is a currently a Request for Proposal (RFP) to begin replacing the aging diesel fleet, and a Request for Information (RFI) to survey the industry about how Amtrak might acquire 400 new cars to replace 467 Amfleet I cars.

That leaves behind a substantial number of cars that are 37 years old or older – equipment that simply can't be rebuilt because they have too many miles and are suffering metal fatigue. The situation was dire in 2010 when Amtrak first raised the alarm about aging equipment, the maintenance complications of multiple configurations and the limited supply base – and it has only become worse since.

To develop recommendations to Amtrak, your Association has convened an Equipment Committee, which will be led by Board Member Dave Randall and will include retired Amtrak design engineer Dick Bruss. Committee members have already concluded that Amtrak should increase the RFI from a 400-car buy to 1,000 cars, to be built over five years, to replace all cars between 37 and 50 years old.

"Consideration for future builder and supply chain stability needs to be an important part of any plan," says Randall. "When builders and their suppliers know they will have ongoing orders, they are more likely to invest in staff, tooling and technology and plan for the future." That same reasoning underpins Randall's suggestion that the line be kept warm after the five-year procurement with construction of perhaps 50 cars per year to replace refurbished Viewliners and Superliner IIs that will be coming out of service, as well as to handle ridership growth.

The Committee also believes Amtrak should think hard about whether it wants to replace bi-level coaches with single-level cars, as Amtrak has suggested. Members note it would take 301 single-level cars to provide the same capacity as the 255 bi-level Superliner I cars that are between 37 and 39 years old.

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## MIDTERM VOTERS CAST KEY TRANSPORTATION BALLOTS; CONGRESS LOOKS TO WRAP UP 2018

While overshadowed by larger political dramas, many Americans had the opportunity to vote for ballot measures and candidates with big implications for U.S. transportation during the November 6th elections. Here are a few of the key transportation takeaways from the 2018 midterms.

### TRANSPORTATION BALLOTS

Election night's biggest win for transit infrastructure happened in CALIFORNIA, where voters rejected an attempt to rescind a 2017 state gasoline tax. Through their overwhelming rejection of the repeal initiative, which failed 55 percent to 45 percent, voters protected \$54 billion in additional infrastructure investment for roads, rails, transit, and ferries. It's yet more proof that—when shown a clear, convincing plan for how the money will be invested locally—the public is willing to put

its money behind infrastructure.

Though that was not the case in COLORADO, where voters shot down two infrastructure initiatives: roads-only Proposition 109 and road-and-transit Proposition 110. Proposition 109 lost 61 percent to 38 percent, while Proposition 110 performed better at 59 percent to 40 percent. In the eventuality of voter rejection, the law that put propositions 109 and 110 before voters requires Colorado's secretary of state to propose another transportation measure for voters in 2019. We hope legislators can develop a more inspiring, future-looking transportation vision by then—that means including a bold vision for 21st century rail transit options.

With the passage of Amendment 11, FLORIDA

## **BALLOTS**, from p. 3

voters struck a constitutional provision requiring the state to develop high-speed rail. The so-called “requirement” to develop high-speed rail is a hold-over from a voter initiative in 2000, repealed by voters in 2004. The private-sector Brightline will do just fine without any constitutional backing, so passengers shouldn’t worry about this.

### **GENERAL MIDTERM TRANSPORTATION TAKEAWAYS**

Democrats took the House of Representatives, while Republicans saw gains in the Senate.

It appears that political trends are accelerating: metropolitan areas are becoming a deeper shade of blue, while rural areas turn even more red. From a rail transportation perspective, that means it’s even more important that Amtrak continue to operate a robust and efficient National Network. If America is to have a sustainable federal program for rail transportation, it must have a rail network that serves urban and rural communities, Red and Blue states. Policymakers—and railroaders—would do well to keep this fact in mind during next year’s surface transportation reauthorization.

### **KEY ELECTORAL RACES – TRANSPORTATION LEADERSHIP**

- It appears that, following a hotly contested recount with multiple accusations of fraud, Gov. Rick Scott will replace incumbent Bill Nelson as senator of Florida. Sen. Nelson is the ranking Democrat on the Senate Commerce Committee, which will play a crucial role in the 2019 transportation reauthorization (see “Congressional Action” for more). Gov. Scott’s first move as governor of Florida was to kill the planned Orlando – Tampa high-speed rail project, though he has had a mixed record with transit and the Brightline projects since.
- Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA), Chair of the House Transportation Subcommittee on Rail lost in a squeaker to challenger Josh Harder (D). Rep. Denham was in the running for the top Republican spot on the Transportation Committee following Rep. Bill Shuster’s (R-PA) retirement. Denham was fiercely opposed to the California high-speed rail project, but fairly supportive of Amtrak.
- Rep. Kevin Cramer (R) will replace Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D) as the senator of North Dakota.

Rep. Cramer is a Rail Passengers Golden Spike recipient for his work in preserving and promoting the Empire Builder.

- Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom became the next governor of California. During his victory speech, Newsom “committed” to completing the first phase of the high-speed rail project from Silicon Valley to the Central Valley.
- Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) was defeated by challenger Colin Allred (D). Passengers won’t be sorry to see the last of the Amtrak-killing amendments that Rep. Sessions frequently filed during his tenure in the House.
- Gov. Scott Walker, who famously killed a Milwaukee to Madison passenger rail corridor to signal his opposition to the Obama Administration—simultaneously killing off a planned Talgo rail equipment manufacturing plant planned for Milwaukee, as well as the attendant manufacturing jobs—was defeated by Tony Evers (D).

### **CONGRESSIONAL ACTION RESUMES**

Members of Congress returned to the Hill on November 14th to wrap up 2018 business, with the biggest agenda item being an attempt to avert a government shutdown during the holidays.

The short-term Continuing Resolution that passed at the end of September expires on December 7, and there are still seven departmental budgets to pass, including Transportation, Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, State, and Treasury. Leadership will have to determine strategy: a seven-bill omnibus, a series of smaller packages, or yet another short-term funding resolution.

While the overarching strategy has yet to be settled, the funding numbers appear to be largely set—and they look good for passenger rail and transit. With only a few policy riders yet to be decided, transit advocates hope Congress gets its work done, providing some much-needed and long-awaited funding predictability.

### **PASSENGER RAIL GRANT FUNDS CONTINUE TO TRICKLE OUT**

That predictability would allow states to better utilize programs like the Federal-State Partnership



# A LOOK TO 2019

As full as 2018 was, expect 2019 to be even more action-packed. With a transportation reauthorization, rumors of an infrastructure bill, a budget crunch, and more changes planned by Amtrak's management, there will be plenty to keep rail advocates busy in the next 12 months.

Below are just a few things to keep on your radar as you prepare for the coming year:

## **BUDGET CRUNCH**

The Budget Control Act (sometimes known as "sequestration") will lower domestic discretionary caps by \$71 billion in FY 2020. That means the relatively flush domestic budgets, which include transportation funding, may be a thing of the past in this year's appropriations process. If transportation advocates can't aid in the repeal of these caps, then they can expect drastic cuts to funding for roads, rails, and transit in the FY2020 budget.

Not incidentally, it would also spell the doom for the oft-rumored, rarely seen infrastructure bill.

## **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION:**

The current FAST Act expires at the end of 2019 and will need to be replaced. The Surface Transportation Reauthorization (STR) will reauthorize the Highway Trust Fund, the Mass Transit Account, grant programs, safety provisions, and special policy provisions.

The obstacles to passing this bill are legion, with the biggest being the waning purchasing power of the federal gas tax. If current spending trends continue,

the CBO projects the Transportation Trust Fund's cumulative deficits will grow from \$21 billion in fiscal year 2022 to \$108 billion by fiscal year 2026.

And that's just to maintain the transportation status quo, which is failing to meet the demands of a 21st century economy. If we expect America to continue to thrive in the face of more people, increased international competition, and aging legacy transit systems, passenger advocates must educate legislators on the need to shake free from the models that dominated the 1900s and create something truly innovative.

## **PROVIDING A VISION FOR AMERICAN RAIL**

All of this relates to our final item: providing a compelling vision for American voters. Many within our coalition have argued that Amtrak doesn't have a vision. This is wrong. Instead, Amtrak appears to be advancing a vision that could exclude tens of millions of Americans. Focusing exclusively on short corridors that only serve major metropolitan areas would double down on the model advanced by airlines, where half of the states in our country become "flyover country"—places to be traveled through, not to. That is why RPA is advancing an alternative, inclusive vision of what rail can be for ALL Americans; a vision that includes more and better trains, and a commitment to infrastructure investment.

Jim Mathews outlined that vision in an open letter to Amtrak, which can be read in full on our website. <https://www.railpassengers.org/happening-now/news/>

## **BALLOTS**, from p. 4

for State of Good Repair Program; the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the program on November 15, making \$272 million in grant funding available.

The FRA will be looking for states to submit projects that repair, replace, or rehabilitate publicly-owned railroad assets, and to improve intercity passenger rail performance. The program focuses on "fix it first," and will likely benefit passenger railroad-owned infrastructure, e.g. Amtrak infrastructure on the Northeast Corridor.

## **RPA PREPARES FOR RAIL REAUTHORIZATION**

In addition to added predictability, wrapping up the 2018 legislative session would allow Congress to more productively focus on the Surface Transportation Reauthorization, which is set to expire in September 2019.

You'll hear more about Rail Passengers' reauthorization blueprint in our next newsletter and throughout 2019. For those interested in finding out more now, visit our reauthorization advocacy page at [www.RailPassengers.org/Reauthorization](http://www.RailPassengers.org/Reauthorization).



**Save The Date For...RPA's  
Spring 2019 Advocacy Summit,  
'Day on The Hill', Congressional  
Reception & Annual Council  
Business Meeting in  
Washington, DC**

**Sunday, March 31 through  
Wednesday, April 3**

- **Host Hotel - Westin City Center  
(1400 M. Street, NW; Washington)  
Discounted Group Rate Rooms Are  
Now Available!**
- **RPA's Annual 'Day on The Hill' &  
Congressional Reception Is Tuesday,  
April 2**
- **Event Registration Starts January 2nd.  
- Visit The Event Page For Complete  
Information**

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

**Friday, December 14  
TrainRiders NE 30th Annual  
Meeting & Lunch - Portland, ME**

**Thursday & Friday,  
January 24 & 25  
15th Annual Southwestern Rail  
Conference - Dallas, TXT**

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

## **RAIL PASSENGERS TRAVEL ADVISORY**

### **WILMINGTON, DE, STATION ACCESS LIMITED DURING AREA CONSTRUCTION**

- As of November 1, street construction in front of the Wilmington, DE, train station has closed East Front Street. The closure will require customers to turn onto French Street for the drop off and pick up of customers at the train station.
- In addition, the rental car return lot will relocate to 110 South French Street. Customers who need to return their rental vehicle will have to access the lot by driving down South French Street and turning left into the lot. Additional public parking is also available 24 hours a day at the DoubleTree Hotel 700 North King Street and until 7 pm at the Wilmington Court House 500 North King Street.

### **AMTRAK CINCINNATI UNION TERMINAL STATION REOPENS**

- As of November 2018, Amtrak is returning to Cincinnati Union Terminal with trains 50 and 51 of the Cardinal. The reopening of the station marks the end of major renovation and enhancement of the building that lasted more than two years and cost \$224 million.
- The Union Terminal building is now open for Amtrak customers from midnight until 4:00 a.m. (local) time every morning with the exception of Mondays.

# STATE NEWS

**THE RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION HOUSTON CHAPTER** (RPA Houston) submitted comments on TxDOT's Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed North Houston Highway Improvement Project. RPA Houston said that it is important for TxDOT to leverage this monumental, once in two generations project to address and improve multi-modal mobility throughout the surrounding Houston area, not just in the project corridor.

**AMTRAK** currently provides passenger rail service to Houston on its Sunset Limited train that runs from New Orleans to Los Angeles, and, via a motorcoach connection to Longview, on the Texas Eagle to Chicago. Amtrak and the Texas Central Railway (TCR) recently announced plans to coordinate ticketing between their trains, thus integrating TCR's proposed Dallas to Houston train with Amtrak's national network. However, Amtrak's Houston station is located "off the beaten track" at the east end of Washington Avenue, sandwiched between the City of Houston's permitting center and the current I-45 alignment, and suffers from lack of access to Metro's transit system. While the



current I-10 HOV lanes connected to Franklin Avenue east of the station could have been used to provide a transit corridor connecting to the station, TxDOT has firmly stated that these ramps must be removed. As an alternative, RPA Houston endorses the proposal to: relocate UPRR's passenger main to the freight main alignment through the Hardy Yards area; construct a new Amtrak station next to Metro's Burnett Transit Center; and establish a transit connection (light rail) connecting downtown, the relocated Amtrak Station, Metro's Northwest Transit Center and TCR's proposed Houston terminus near the Northwest Mall.

## RAIL STATION OF THE MONTH: NILES, MICHIGAN

The Niles station was built for the Michigan Central Railroad in 1892, and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and on the Michigan State Register in 1992.

As it retains much of its grand 19th century character, the Niles station has been used for three movies: *Continental Divide*, *Midnight Run* and *Only the Lonely*. In the last movie, the depot was decorated with Christmas lights for a scene. Since that year, the station has been decorated and lit on the first of December through Christmas, with permanent wiring installed just for that purpose.

*Blue Water* and *Wolverine* trains service Niles Station, and are financed primarily through funds made available by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

As earlier this year Amtrak pulled support staff from various train stations throughout the United States, RPA and a series of volunteers are filling the gap left behind. On Nov. 9 and 10,



Niles, Michigan Train Station

community members in Niles marked the kickoff of the Station Volunteer Program, targeted to help guide passengers, greet inbound trains, and provide additional support services. RPA worked with Niles officials and community members on the pilot program meant to showcase that there is a need volunteers can help address at stations that were de-staffed. A total of 15-17 core volunteers will receive training next month and will be ready to staff the station as of the first of the new year.



## ON THE MOVE

Local, state and federal transit agencies have seen several new hires and appointments in October. A few of them include:

• **Kristina Holcomb** —The Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) in Texas named Kristina Holcomb as its new deputy chief executive officer. In her new role Holcomb will oversee the execution of the agency's strategic initiatives, as well as regional transportation infrastructure planning, land-use strategy, and state and federal public policy. Holcomb joined DCTA in 2007.

• **Sue Bauman** — The Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART) Board of Directors re-elected Sue Bauman as its chair. Bauman was first appointed to the board in 2016 and was elected chair in 2017. Bauman acted as the vice president of marketing and communications for DART until she retired in 2011.

• **Rachel Maleh** has been named the executive director of Operation Lifesaver Inc. (OLI), a nonprofit devoted to rail safety in the U.S. Maleh previously served as OLI's interim chief operating officer since February 2018,



(Photo Credit: Operation Lifesaver Inc.)

Rachel Maleh, Executive director of Operation Lifesaver Inc.

and she succeeds Interim President Wende Corcoran.



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1200 G Street, NW, Suite 240  
Washington, DC 2005-3818  
202-408-8362 | 202-408-8287 (fax)  
www.railpassengers.org | narprail.org