



RAIL PASSENGERS  
ASSOCIATION

# PASSENGERS Voice

FEBRUARY 2019 | VOL. 53, NO. 2

## HOUSE DEMS PASS BILL WITH RAIL SUPPORT; BILL AWAITS SENATE

The Democrats first action upon taking over the House of Representatives was to pass a bill that would fund the government for the remainder of fiscal year 2019 and end the government shutdown. The bill includes funding for transportation and passenger rail, including \$1.29 billion for Amtrak’s National Network and \$650 million for Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor. The National Network funds included a \$50 million set-aside dedicated to continuing passenger rail operations on long-distance routes, which was a provision drafted by Senators from Southwest Chief states who were looking to ensure continued service for the train.

The House bill includes \$817 million across a number of capital and safety grant programs that will be used to upgrade state supported corridors and the NEC. Critically, the bill also includes language that Rail Passengers worked to include in the Senate version: “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.”

This is a good outcome for passengers, and it’s now up to the Senate to pass this bill. The transportation budget is based on Senate numbers, so funding levels won’t be controversial. However, the bill doesn’t include money for President Trump’s border wall, and it’s unclear when the Senate GOP leadership will put this bill up for a vote.

**U.S. Representative Peter DeFazio (D-OR) was elected as chairman of the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure this month.** Given DeFazio’s longtime service on the committee, the selection was expected—and in fact, DeFazio has spent the post-election months stumping for a grand infrastructure bargain.

Central to his plan is \$500 billion in spending for highways, transit, rail, airports, and water projects. DeFazio has identified several sources of funding, including an increase in gas taxes, the issuance of 30-year bonds, and a new Vehicle Miles Traveled tax. While the spending side is less clear, the new Chair has gone on record in support of passenger

**BILL, p. 2**

## RAILNATION 2019 TO SHOWCASE “BLUEPRINT 2020: BE THE ARCHITECT”



The United States Capitol.

(Photo Credit: Wally Gobetz)

Rail Passengers’ 2019 spring meeting is fast approaching, and you’re invited to come take part in the biggest passenger rail advocacy meeting in the nation’s capital. The meeting will be held at the Westin City Center, March 31 – April 3.

The theme of this year’s Washington, D.C. RailNation meeting is “Blueprint 2020: Be the Architect.” It reflects the pivotal phase in U.S. transportation policy the

**BLUEPRINT, p. 2**

“I will fight for common sense, comprehensive solutions to address the major issues facing our aging, 20th century infrastructure and champion a smarter, greener infrastructure that helps to reduce carbon pollution.”

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio on being named Chairman of the House T&I Committee



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This issue has news through January 16, 2019.  
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## BLUEPRINT, from p. 1

U.S. Congress is entering, as legislators begin to draft the replacement for the current surface transportation authorization. This bill will do more than just determine the next six years of federal transportation investment.

Given the unsustainability of the Highway Trust Fund—which the Congressional Budget Office projects the trust fund’s cumulative deficits will grow from \$21 billion in fiscal year 2022 to \$108 billion by fiscal year 2026—legislators will be hard pressed to replace the current status quo with something new and forward-looking.

This crisis in highway spending is an opportunity for rail and transit, and passengers must seize it.

We’re inviting you to help us draft this blueprint for a better American rail system, and help us

sell it to Congress as they debate the future of transportation in this country.

The majority of panels will be held on Monday, April 1, and will include:

- A panel of transportation experts debating how to comprehensively restructure U.S. intercity, commuter, and urban rail systems to introduce a hybrid urban-suburban rail model. This hybrid model has already been a demonstrated success in Germany (S-Bahn) and France (Paris RER) and would allow for the creation of a faster, more frequent rail service within the constrained fiscal environment.

- Future of Rail Excursions in the U.S.: A panel of travel experts will discuss the future of excursion trains in the U.S., new equipment

## BLUEPRINT, p. 3

## BILL, from p. 1

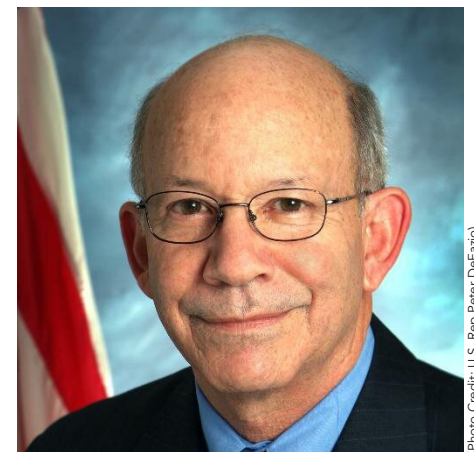
trains and the national network.

“Rep. DeFazio understands the true transit needs of U.S. commuters, as well as the investment required to bring the nation’s infrastructure into the 21st Century,” said Rail Passengers President Jim Mathews. “We look forward to meeting and working with DeFazio to ensure that Congress is well-aware of the challenges facing passenger rail in the U.S., and the best ways to address them.”

**Rail Passengers has confirmed that Amtrak will be providing matching funds for a \$9.2**

**million federal CRISI grant to install Positive Train Control on the Southwest Chief.** The grant was awarded to the Colorado and Kansas Departments of Transportation, in partnership with Amtrak and BNSF. It will fund the design, installation, and testing of PTC wayside technology on about 179 miles of a predominantly single-track route between Dodge City, KS, and Las Animas, CO.

This is a welcome change of policy, given Amtrak’s 2018 refusal to provide its \$3 million match for the \$16 million TIGER grant awarded to the Southwest Chief restoration project. We still have no update on the status of



U.S. Rep Peter DeFazio (D-OR) was elected as chairman of the House Committee on T&I.

Amtrak’s match for this grant, but rest assured that Rail Passengers will continue to press the railroad on this important issue.

# ACTING FOR PASSENGERS IN UNION PACIFIC SUNSET SUSPENSION

Rail Passengers staff has started taking action after learning recently from Trains magazine's online service that Union Pacific track work suddenly forced Amtrak to suspend one of the Sunset Limited's three weekly round-trips for seven weeks -- but we need your help.

While this Association understands, and applauds, efforts to improve track and rights-of-way, we're denouncing the suddenness of this service suspension and are calling on Union Pacific to treat fare-paying passengers with more respect.

If you live along the Sunset's route, or are otherwise a regular Sunset rider, please share with us specifics about how your life and plans are

being affected by Union Pacific's sudden move on track work. Email your stories to [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org).

We believe, but haven't confirmed, that UP's original demand to Amtrak was for a complete suspension of the Sunset for the seven-week duration of this track maintenance project.

Rail Passengers staff notified members and other passengers about these service changes on Jan. 9. Rail Passengers President and CEO Jim Mathews has written to UP CEO Lance Fritz for details on how something as planned and long-range as a capital project could crop up so suddenly as to give passengers only 13 days'



Sunset Limited along the Cienega Creek, near Tucson, AZ.

(Photo Credit: Trains)

warning that their train was being annulled.

The Association is also notifying affected communities—mayors, town managers, Members of Congress, etc.—about the sudden suspension, and is asking them to be part of our campaign to restore daily service to the Sunset.

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## BLUEPRINT, from p. 2

and technologies, demographic shifts, changes in Amtrak policy, and the role of other operators in filling the gap.

- A bipartisan panel detailing the view from the Hill, including an outline of where the Republican and Democratic agendas overlap and where they diverge.
- A presentation from Amtrak on the changes coming to service delivery, including updates to food & beverage service on National Network trains.
- An update from Rail Passenger President Jim Mathews' on the work our association has done in influencing national transportation goals as part of the National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure,

which provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation.

As always, the Rail Passengers' Council—along with any interested passenger advocates—will spend our Tuesday in D.C. on Capitol Hill outlining the national and regional recommendations of goals that are important to America's passengers.

With so many new members of Congress following last autumn's midterm elections, this will be an even more important day of advocacy.

Rail Passengers' Day on the Hill will be capped by our annual Congressional reception, where we will honor the six Senators who helped preserve the

Southwest Chief in the face of an Amtrak proposal to break the route in two.

## RAILNATION BLUEPRINT 2020 - AGENDA

- Sunday, March 31 - 5PM - Open Board of Director Meeting
- Monday, April 1 - All Day - Summit Speakers & Presentations
- Tuesday, April 2 - RPA Day on The Hill & Congressional Reception
- Wednesday, April 3 - Morning - RPA Council Annual Business Meeting

For more information on RailNation, please visit: <http://ow.ly/XWHT30nknMU>.

# SOUTHWEST CHIEF BRINGS \$180M ANNUALLY TO NEW MEXICO, COLORADO AND KANSAS

Thwarting plans to replace a portion of Amtrak's Southwest Chief service with a bus between Albuquerque, NM and Dodge City, KS, saved the economies of New Mexico, Colorado and Kansas from what would have been \$180 million in annual losses, according to the findings of a new study by the Rail Passengers Association and the University of Southern Mississippi. Had it gone through, the bus bridge also would have imposed a temporary loss of \$135 million in those communities, the study showed.

As the report -- Bstituted: The Socioeconomic Impacts of Replacing Southwest Chief Service

Over Raton Pass -- shows, the \$180-million economic loss annually would be the result of "Permanent Direct Economic Losses" totaling \$116.4 million, as well as "Permanent Indirect Losses" of \$63.7 million. Direct losses consist of cancelled operating spending, fewer visitors and lost income from those visitors, and higher travel costs for families that live along the Southwest Chief route. The indirect losses would be felt through increased pollution control, highway fatalities, increased highway maintenance and forgone trips.

These losses alone are more than three times what Amtrak requests from Congress to operate the entire route of the Southwest Chief, which runs from city to city, through eight states: Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and California. An additional \$135 million in "Temporary Direct Economic Losses" would result from the cancelled construction related to Positive Train Control (PTC), a safety technology mandated by the federal government that can remotely monitor and control of train's speed.



The socio-economic effects of Southwest Chief bus bridge.  
Photo Credit: Rail Passengers Association

The new study also examined the socio-economic effects of Amtrak implementing a bus bridge. The results are significant as thousands of people who rely on train service for school, work, vacation and even hospital visits would lose easy access. Socio-economic effects include 32 universities would lose train service; 47 hospitals would lose train service; 130,000 induced auto trips, diverted onto roads that are four times more dangerous than the national average; and bus-bridge communities have the lowest median income (\$35K) of those served on the route.

When the bus bridge proposal surfaced last year, the Rail Passengers

Association commissioned a team of researchers from the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott National Center to determine how life might change for the people who live, work, visit or study in affected towns. The USM team was led by research professor Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang and the work was supported by funds from the generous bequest of the late George McCallum.

Together, Rail Passengers and USM built a model to account for factors ranging from direct spending to construction, labor, local tax payments and visitation and tourist spending. The model builds on work done by USM and Transportation for America (T4A), and funded by the Southern Rail Commission (SRC), to quantify the economic benefits of rail service for Gulf Coast communities. Rail Passengers is indebted to T4A and the SRC for their work on the economic impact of passenger trains. Using our advanced model, the Rail Passengers team will be able to expand on this work on a county-by-county basis on any route in the U.S., or even to help assess the potential value of service in an area not yet served by rail.

# RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION BOARD DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

Nominations are now being sought from qualified Rail Passengers Association members interested in being elected to one of two available Board Director positions at the upcoming Council of Representatives Annual Business Meeting being held on Wednesday, April 3, 2019.

These Board Director positions are for three-year terms, ending in April 2022.

For more information on how you could make a difference as a Rail Passengers Association Board Director, please review the position's required qualifications, description, duties and responsibilities at:

[www.railpassengers.org/about/leadership/board/become-a-board-director](http://www.railpassengers.org/about/leadership/board/become-a-board-director).

If you are interested in seeking a Board Director position, you must complete and submit a Candidate Information Statement by the March 31, 2019 deadline. It is available online at: [www.cognitofrms.com/RailPassengerAssociation/CandidateInformationStatementFor2019RPANARPBBoardDirectorElections](http://www.cognitofrms.com/RailPassengerAssociation/CandidateInformationStatementFor2019RPANARPBBoardDirectorElections).

Questions may be directed to either Board Chair Peter LeCody at [plecody@narprail.org](mailto:plecody@narprail.org) or Vice-President of Operations Bruce Becker at [bbecker@narprail.org](mailto:bbecker@narprail.org).

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## RAIL PASSENGERS TRAVEL ADVISORY

### \*\*\*TRACK WORK AFFECTS SERVICE FOR CAROLINIAN AND PALMETTO TRAINS\*\*\*

Through March 7, CSX Transportation will perform track work causing approximately 30-minute delays and schedule changes along the route.

- **Monday - Thursday, February 4 - 7:** Palmetto Service: Trains 89 and 90 will operate between New York and Washington, DC, only. Trains are cancelled between Washington, DC and Savannah with no alternate transportation provided.
- **Other Delays:** Monday through Thursday through March 7, Trains 52, 52, 89, 90, 97 and 98 can expect approximately 30 minutes of delays between Rocky Mount and Fayetteville.

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### \*\*\*BUS SERVICE BETWEEN ATLANTA AND NEW ORLEANS \*\*\* ON CRESCENT ROUTE (TRAINS 19/20)

Track work being performed by Norfolk Southern Railway will affect Trains 19 and 20 between New Orleans and Atlanta, on the following dates: Feb. 4 - Feb. 7 and Feb. 11 - Feb. 14.

- **Southbound Train 19:** New York to Atlanta Only On the dates shown above, Train 19 will terminate in Atlanta. Passengers will be provided bus service from Atlanta to Anniston, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Meridian, Laurel, Hattiesburg, Picayune, Slidell and New Orleans.
- **Northbound Train 20:** Atlanta to New York Only On the dates shown above, Train 20 will originate in Atlanta. Passengers will be provided bus service from New Orleans to Slidell, Picayune, Hattiesburg, Laurel, Meridian, Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Anniston and Atlanta.

## Make Plans To Attend RPA's Spring 2019 Advocacy Summit, 'Day on The Hill', Congressional Reception & Annual Council Business Meeting in Washington, D.C.

Sunday, March 31 through  
Wednesday, April 3

- Event Registration Is Now Open!
- 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
- Visit The Event Page For Complete Information

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

Saturday, March 9  
ESPA/RPA Joint New York State Advocates Meeting & Lunch - Schenectady, NY

Saturday, March 9  
Rail Passengers Kentucky Meeting - Louisville, KY

Saturday, May 18  
Rail Passengers Northwest Division Meeting - Cut Bank, MT

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 MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

### QUESTION...

**WHEN IT COMES TO EATING IN THE DINING CAR, YOU'D RATHER:**

Yes/No

**A. Yes** - Make reservations for a specific seating time.

**B. No** - Be able to eat throughout the day, what I want, where and when I want.

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](mailto:survey@narprail.org).

Late last year we began conducting polls on social media and in our newsletters to spark conversation and provide another outlet for you to share your opinions on recent passenger rail news. In December, we asked if you all had a relationship with the local office of your congressional representative and if you share your views about passenger rail and transportation with them. Over 100 passenger rail advocates responded, and dozens of you submitted comments.

### Here are two that really stood out:

• **Joe Kurland:** "Luckily my Congressman cares about trains but he needs people to call and tell him that they support his efforts for trains. In the past year I've met him twice at rail passenger events and called his office numerous times telling him about the need for increased investment in passenger trains. Please everyone, do the same."

• **Randy Becker:** "Our new Congresswoman (FL-26) is seeking appointment to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I have already talked with her and will continue to do so. She and I are on a first-name basis so that helps. If there are more like her in the incoming class of Representatives, we are in good shape."

# RAIL STATION OF THE MONTH: UTAH

By Mike Christensen, Executive Director Utah Rail Passengers Association

Recently I established the Utah Rail Passengers Association to advocate for state-sponsored Amtrak service in Utah that would connect north to Logan, southeast to Grand Junction, and southwest to Cedar City with motorcoach service connecting further to Saint George. More details at [www.UtahRPA.org](http://www.UtahRPA.org).

In December, I made my first field visits starting with Moab, which is a town of 5,000 residents and—located near Arches and Canyonlands National Parks—is the tourist hub of southeastern Utah. A committee was recently established to explore options for implementing transit service in and around Moab, as the entrance to Arches National Park is often closed by the Utah Highway Patrol when the highway becomes clogged with vehicles trying to enter the park.

In other words, Moab has realized that in order to continue to grow its tourist industry, more transportation options are needed for visitors. I met with the committee to introduce state-sponsored Amtrak service as an option for moving people between Salt Lake City and Moab, which was summarized by *Moab Times-Independent* ([www.moabtimes.com](http://www.moabtimes.com)).



The Amtrak sign at Green River, UT.

On the same trip, I also made visits to Green River, Price, and Helper. Those familiar with the route of the California Zephyr across Utah will be aware of these towns. Green River has a population just under 1,000 and boasts an Amtrak station. Despite its remoteness, Green River's population has remained steady due to its location along the Union Pacific line and Interstate 70.

Price has a population of about 9,000 and lies on the route of the California Zephyr but lacks a station. The dwindling coal industry has left Price searching for new economic opportunities. Nearby, Helper has a population of just over 2,000 and a growing tourist industry due to its quaint Main Street. Its Amtrak station is a mere stone's throw from Main Street, so an increase in trains would be a boon to its economy.

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## STATE NEWS

**NJ RAILROAD PASSENGERS GIVES “D” TO NEW JERSEY ADMINISTRATION** The New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers has given New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy's administration a “D” grade managing New Jersey Transit in 2018. NJ-ARP President Len Resto said that a big reason for the poor grade is due to a lack of communication from the administration and the transit agency to its riders on important updates. For example, Resto said that NJ Transit has not been clear on why the Atlantic City Rail Line will still be shut down until early 2019.

**RAIL PASSENGERS VIEW ON NSRL GAINS TRACTION WITH COMMONWEALTH MAGAZINE** Last month we reported that Rail Passengers

President Jim Mathews shared his views on the highly questionable \$17 billion estimate for the North-South Rail Link project at a public-comment session held by MassDOT. Since that meeting, an Op-Ed by Mathews was picked up by **Commonwealth Magazine**. In it Mathews said, “It's time we all recognize that the cost of doing nothing is high. Congestion last year imposed \$5.7 billion in costs on Boston commuters alone. And every year we wait to take action, the cost of doing something goes up. Meanwhile, 60 world-class cities around the globe have made these kinds of investments to transform their legacy commuter rail systems into an all-day regional rapid transit system. Anyone who has hopped aboard France's RER service from Paris can back me up on this.”



## ON THE MOVE

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

- **Kathleen Baldwin** — The Board of Directors for Travelers Aid International (TAI) selected Kathleen Baldwin as its new president. Baldwin assumes her role on February 11, and she previously served as the president of Travelers Aid Society of San Diego.

### Amtrak has made three significant leadership changes:

- **Roger Harris** was named VP of Long Distance Service Line. Harris is responsible for the business performance of Amtrak's routes of 750 miles or more between endpoints..

- **Robert Jordan** was named Assistant VP of Stations. This is a new position and Jordan is responsible for the day-to-day

operations at more than 500 stations.

- **Bruno Maestri** was named VP of Government Affairs and Corporate Communications. Maestri is responsible for securing Amtrak's annual funding through Congress, and for enhancing and protecting Amtrak's reputation and brand.

## CORRECTION

The headline on the AIRNet-21 story (January Passengers Voice, page 3) should have been "AIRNet-21: A Different Approach to Amtrak." The actual headline, "Privatizing the Northeast Corridor," was not accurate, since ownership of the Corridor under AIRNet-21 would remain the property of the federal government, just like it is today. A private infrastructure management organization selected by the Surface Transportation Board would get a 50-year, revocable lease along with strict obligations to accomplish major and minor capital improvements,

and to facilitate the operation of as many trains as is safe.



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