



# PASSENGERS Voice

MAY 2020 | VOL. 54, NO. 5

## CORONAVIRUS RELIEF PACKAGE INCLUDES \$1 BILLION FOR AMTRAK, \$25 BILLION FOR TRANSIT AGENCIES

Congress approved a \$2 trillion coronavirus relief package on March 27, providing critically needed financial assistance to rail and transit operators across the country.

million passengers in the U.S. who depend on passenger rail to work and travel—whether it’s intercity, commuter, or transit,” said Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews.

Congress to intercity rail operators and transit agencies in Phase 3 legislation meets or exceeds the levels outlined in the Rail Passengers’ COVID19 request. This financial aid includes:

### AMTRAK GRANTS - \$1.018 BILLION

- Northeast Corridor - \$492 million;
- National Network - \$526 million;
- State Supported Corridors: \$239 million

### MASS TRANSIT GRANTS - \$25 BILLION

- Urban Area - 13.9 billion
- Rural Area - \$1.8 billion
- State of Good Repair - \$7.6 billion
- Fast-Growth & High-Density State - \$1.7 billion

We’re actively tracking any

### RELIEF PACKAGE, p. 2



CARES Act Package (Photo Credit: The White House)

The bill (H.R. 748) provided Amtrak over \$1 billion in aid to weather the precipitous drop in ridership, and directed \$25 billion to the nation’s struggling transit providers—the largest single-year transit appropriation in U.S. history.

“I want to thank the members of Congress who supported this aid package for rail transportation on behalf of the more than 40

“While addressing the health crisis will always be the most important part of our response, it’s important that we all understand the gravity of the current moment for our nation’s infrastructure. If we want these services to be there when we start traveling and commuting normally, then the time to act is now.”

The funding directed by

“If we want these [passenger rail] services to be there when we start traveling and commuting normally, then the time to act is now.”

Jim Mathews,  
Rail Passengers President & CEO



# RAIL PASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

## ©National Association of Railroad Passengers

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)

### Volunteer Leadership

Peter J. LeCody, Chairman

Ken Briers, Vice Chair

Carl Fowler, Vice Chair

Thomas Girsch, Vice Chair

W. David Randall, Vice Chair

Kenneth T. Clifford, Treasurer

William C. Dunn, Secretary

### STAFF

Jim Mathews (Ext. 3200), President & CEO

Sean Jeans-Gail (Ext. 3201), Vice Pres., Policy

Jonsie Stone (Ext. 3207), Dir. Resource Development

Kim Williams (Ext. 3123), Membership Manager

Alicia Guinn (Ext. 3205), Executive Assistant

To The President

Joseph Aiello (Ext. 3210), Field Coordinator

Donna Thomas, Production Editor

This issue has news through April 17, 2020.

Vol. 54, No. 5 was mailed May 1, 2020.

## RELIEF PACKAGE, from p. 1

additional needs, and will continue to work with Congress to ensure that these systems are able to return to full service once travel restrictions are eventually eased.

## USING INFRASTRUCTURE TO GET AMERICA BACK TO WORK

Shortly after the Phase 3 bill passed, House Democrats and the White House were already suggesting that the next bill should move beyond simply providing near-term relief for companies and workers, and start using infrastructure investments to create new jobs, stimulate demand for materials, and produce tangible, long-lasting benefits for Americans and our economy.

“The president said in the campaign and since [that]

infrastructure was a priority for him,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said during an April 1 conference call to discuss how Congress could use increased infrastructure investment to

stimulate the collapsing demand that threatens to cripple the U.S. economy. “That’s probably the most bipartisan path we could take.”

It echoed comments tweeted earlier by President Donald Trump, who reiterated calls for a massive infrastructure package to grow jobs and address the nation’s growing infrastructure crisis.

“With interest rates for the United States being at ZERO, this is the time to do our decades long awaited Infrastructure Bill,” tweeted President Trump. “It should be VERY BIG & BOLD, Two Trillion Dollars, and be focused solely on jobs and rebuilding the once great infrastructure of our Country!”

However, as Democrats and Republicans debated the scope of the Phase 4 of the coronavirus response, plans to include infrastructure in the next bill were pushed to the side—for now, at least.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell put forth a plan for \$250 billion in additional funding for a federal small business loan program.

Democrats, meanwhile, are pushing for a \$500 billion bill—

one that would direct \$250 billion towards small businesses, but also provide \$100 billion for hospitals and \$150 billion for state and local governments, which are expected to see their budgets

*“I want to thank the members of Congress who supported this aid package for rail transportation on behalf of the more than 40 million passengers in the U.S. who depend on passenger rail to work and travel.”*

—Jim Mathews

demolished in the coming weeks by a loss in revenues from sales and payroll taxes. This disagreement has pushed talks of using infrastructure to get Americans back to work to the sidelines. Last week, Democrats and President Trump came together in a rare moment of bipartisanship to call for a massive boost in funding during the next phase of the coronavirus response.

Now, it appears that infrastructure will slide to a Phase 5 response, with some political commentators predicting that it will arrive in mid-summer.

With another 6.6 million Americans claiming unemployment this week—bringing the three-week total to 16.8 million newly unemployed—there will certainly be the need for an investment program that offers people opportunities to work.

**Rail Passengers is preparing a list of passenger rail and transit programs that could quickly begin construction at [RailPassengers.org/Covid19](http://RailPassengers.org/Covid19). If you know of a project in your area that is included in your state’s rail plan, or is in the federal permitting process, please let us know by emailing Joe Aiello at [jaiello\[at\]narprail.org](mailto:jaiello[at]narprail.org) (subject: infrastructure bill).**

## VIEW FROM THE HILL: RAIL PASSENGERS DAY ON THE HILL CONTINUES IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

---

Despite being forced to cancel our annual Rail Passengers Day on the Hill by a state of emergency in D.C. and Virginia, Rail Passengers' volunteer leaders and members rallied during the first week of April to speak with their elected officials about the importance of passenger trains to our towns and our economy.

Over the phone, over conference calls, and over video web-conferences our members thanked members of Congress for coming to the aid of Amtrak and transit agencies, who are confronting an unprecedented crisis caused by the coronavirus' impact on the transportation sector. They recruited their members of Congress to help us take concrete steps to improve our nation's passenger rail network and the onboard experience of everyday passengers.

Thanks to the hard work of our Council of Representatives, this Association delivered our message to 144 House offices and 59 Senate offices. That is an impressive feat given the many novel challenges

our Council Members faced, and the chaos and short-staffing affecting most Congressional offices as they struggled to pass legislation in a global pandemic.

We thanked Congress for the aid delivered to railroads and transit agencies in the Phase 3 coronavirus package; asked for meaningful funding for new equipment, more frequencies and added service; and explained how an infrastructure bill could put millions of Americans back to work building the passenger rail network our country deserves.

Amtrak President & CEO Richard Anderson reached out to Rail Passengers to thank our members and staff for their outreach on behalf of Amtrak passengers during this critical period.

"On behalf of everyone at Amtrak, thank you for letting Congress know of your support for emergency funding for passenger rail in the recently enacted COVID-19 Phase 3 relief bill, also known as the CARES Act," wrote Anderson. "Congress's aid to

Amtrak reflects the many voices of support for passenger rail that Congress heard while drafting this bill. With your backing, Congress directed over \$1 billion for Amtrak and our state partners to mitigate the impacts of the current crisis on our employees and trains. I am proud of the safe, sustainable transportation we provide – and thanks to your support and this emergency funding, we will be able to continue to play this important role."

Members of Congress asked for our help in return. They asked our members and staff which rail projects we believe are the top priorities for funding, and our ideas for how to fund these programs. They wanted to know what we'd like to see in the upcoming passenger rail reauthorization, and how we can improve the passenger experience onboard Amtrak trains.

Thanks to your support, we were able to serve as a resource for Congressional offices who remain committed to rebuilding America's rail network in these troubled times.

---

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

Upcoming Events | go to [railpassengers.org/events](https://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](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org)) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and online) of upcoming events!

# A LOOK BACK

By Madi Butler

With our travels currently suspended, this seemed a great time to dive into the archives and highlight some of the historic happenings in the month of May.

These were a few of the gems our team found while exploring our history:

**MAY 1, 1971** - Amtrak began its first day of operation serving 314 communities with 184 Amtrak trains traversing the 23,000 mile network.

**MAY 1974** - After receiving support from Federal Energy administrator John Sawhill, encouraging Americans to take "energy-conscious vacations", Amtrak officials began a phase of conversations regarding intermodal accessibility, car rentals, recreational vehicles, transit providers, and tourists. While we've seen the

reasons to let go of some of the more experimental ideas noted in Amtrak's internal newspaper May 15th 1974, many of these initiatives lead to the development of Amtrak Vacations and improvement to the Auto Train service.

**MAY 1988** - By special invitation, NARP Members, elected officials, and esteemed guests were welcomed to the Viewliner Prototype unveiling at Union Station Dallas.

While the event details were not found in archival material, the invitation and commemorative photo are in the Amtrak public archives.

This particular May was also spent breaking down the language in the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 1988 which was made into law the following month. With its amendments to Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory

Reform Act of 1976 and Federal Railroad Safety Act of 1970, this created opportunity for a plethora of Northeast Corridor projects in the years to follow.

**MAY 1993** - The x2000 and Intercity Express were two European high speed electric sets leased to Amtrak for both revenue service and public display.

This national tour brought the reality of high-speed rail to many Americans for the first time. Featured in Hotline #773, it was reported that after spanning DC to Orlando, the x2000 made its way across the country to California before being sent back to Europe.

If you have an anniversary or historic date you would like featured in upcoming newsletters, please reach out to Madi Butler [mbutler@narprail.org](mailto:mbutler@narprail.org) with your story, photos, and details.

## RAIL'S \$5B POTENTIAL FOR ALABAMA

Expanding passenger-rail service in Alabama could inject nearly \$5 billion into the state's economy and put nearly 31,000 Alabamans to work building it during the next 15 years, and once in operation the three proposed segments could generate anywhere

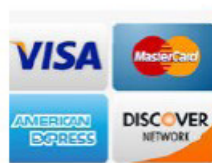
from \$102 million to nearly \$900 million annually from increased travel and tourism, according to a new economic analysis for the Southern Rail Commission.

**ALABAMA**, p. 7

## Make donations and pay your membership dues



Set up an ACH/eCheck payment with your bank



Use a Credit or Debit Card  
Donate: [www.railpassengers.org/donate](http://www.railpassengers.org/donate)  
Renew: [www.railpassengers.org/renew](http://www.railpassengers.org/renew)



Call our Main Office at [202] 408 - 8362



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

## RAIL NEWS FROM AROUND THE NATION

As Passengers' Voice went to press, California's financial regulators approved \$600 million in private-activity bonds to back Virgin Trains USA's planned Las Vegas/Southern California service, clearing the way for the company to raise some \$2.4 billion and putting Virgin Trains on track to break ground on building the line by the end of this year. Nevada is expected to follow with its own approval soon, which would unlock another \$800 million.

Kansas lawmakers took one more step to linking the Texas Eagle and the Southwest Chief, unanimously passing a resolution last month to extend the Heartland Flyer's daily round trip between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City north to Newton, Kan., where it would connect to the Chief. Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly (D) proposed dedicating state budget funds for preliminary work to develop additional passenger rail services.

A 60-day public comment period is now open on the Federal Railroad Administration's long-awaited proposals for new passenger-rail service metrics and standards, which include a single customer-facing on-time standard, quarterly quality reports on things like cleanliness and food service, and financial performance measured and published against both the PRIIA-required Avoidable Costs standard and the existing Fully Allocated Costs methodology. Many of

the elements of the proposed rules reflect input your Rail Passengers professional staff supplied to FRA and Amtrak last summer.

Like many projects worldwide, Texas Central's Dallas-to-Houston bullet train is being put on hold due to the current global pandemic.

The company laid off 28 employees but will maintain a core team to be ready to move forward. Texas Central CEO Carlos Aguilar acknowledged that tough decisions were made in order to "make the best use of our current funding," but also noted that construction could begin once global financial markets stabilize. Since the announcement, some of the railroad's European partners have begun to resume operations.

In a move Rail Passengers CEO Jim Mathews called "intellectually dishonest," a group of Texas lawmakers led by state representative Ben Leman (R) recently urged U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao to suspend the federal Rule of Particular Applicability rulemaking underway right now to clear Texas Central's high-speed rail project, citing the coronavirus outbreak and implying that the wholly private-funded venture is somehow jeopardizing federal dollars.

## 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](mailto: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.



## 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.
- **Monthly-paying members will always have their membership dues pulled out on the same date every month, as auto-renewal is required for monthly membership. To cancel your monthly membership, please contact our office at 202-408-8362, ext. 3123 or [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org).**
- 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.

## JOIN RAIL PASSENGERS



# 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](https://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](https://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](mailto:TravelReview@narprail.org).

## RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

### QUESTION...

**HAVE YOU PLANNED OUT YOUR FIRST POST-VIRUS TRIP?**



**A. Yes** - Yes, my bags are already packed!

**B. No** - No, still taking a wait and see approach.

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).

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](mailto:TravelReview@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 April, we asked: **Did you have to cancel a trip due to the COVID-19 outbreak?**

Unfortunately, an overwhelming **85%** of the people who took our poll said that they had to cancel a trip due to the ongoing crisis.

Many of the comments to our Facebook post lamented the loss of trips with grandchildren, plans to see friends, or even the cancelation of - as was the case with Susan D'Entremont - a first ever sleeper trip.

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Lynn Aldrich  
**Where are you located?** I live in Taos, New Mexico  
**When did you become a member?** Years ago (too many to remember) I was talking to someone who got off the train in Lamy, NM (which is now my Amtrak stop) and had given

me a brochure about RPA (then NARP). I joined because I traveled long distance by train and liked the Amtrak discount for members.

**What does RPA mean to you?:** I became a member, I started reading the newsletter and I appreciated the information about train schedules. When I retired and moved to New Mexico, prior newsletters had informed me of the threats to the Southwest Chief - the primary train I'd ridden all those years to visit family in California. I volunteered to fill the vacancy for the New Mexico state representative on the RPA (then NARP) Council to help the efforts to find funding for the route. As a member of the

Council, I've learned more about the national network and how the Association advocates for a better passenger rail system for all of us. As a coach passenger myself, I can represent so many of the fellow passengers - regardless if they are members. The Rail Passengers role in advocating for a national network is so important to me that I'm also a member of the Candidate Certification Committee and the Finance Committee, helping to sustain us as an organization. RPA's paper on the economic benefits of the Southwest Chief for Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico was important to showing our legislators how important Amtrak was to the states and communities through which it travels, resulting in overwhelming Congressional support for Amtrak. The DC staff, Council and RPA members' advocacy have been crucial to getting to a place where there is consistent Congressional support for Amtrak and for commuter rail. I believe that the Association is vitally important to the continuation of Amtrak's national network and I will work to assure that RPA and its members can continue to do this work.

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](mailto:kwilliams@narprail.org).

## ALABAMA, from p. 4

In the study carried out by Alabama's Jacksonville State University, researchers took a closer look at existing feasibility studies for rail services connecting Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile while also evaluating the study for high-speed rail from Atlanta, GA to Birmingham. The study accounts for potential economic gains from tourism, construction, operations and other investments, all of which combine to create benefits to the entire state.

Building on modeling work carried out for SRC by the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott Center, **the new analysis examined what the three segments -- Birmingham to Montgomery, Montgomery to Mobile and, eventually, Atlanta to Birmingham -- might generate for the state's economy as they phase in.**

The low-end estimate, which assumed minimal

operations revenue for the service and a 1% increase in travel and tourism, would support 657 jobs related to operating the trains and serving the needs of new travelers: 156 on the first segment between Birmingham and Montgomery, 245 later on when Montgomery to Mobile comes together, and then 256 when the third and final segment is in operation.

The high-end estimate presumed stronger ridership and tourism increases of anywhere from 17% to 24%, depending on the segment, and supports some 8,421 jobs.

"As a follow up to the great work done by the USM on the economic impact related to the restart of passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast, it was professionally rewarding to conduct this assessment for the state of Alabama," said Jennifer Green, who is Director of the Center for Economic Development and Business Research at Jacksonville State.

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

**JOIN THE DIGITAL  
CONVERSATION:**



**@RAILPASSENGERS  
@NARPRAIL**



**RAIL PASSENGERS**  
ASSOCIATION

1200 G Street, NW, Suite 240  
Washington, DC 2005-3818  
202-408-8362 | 202-408-8287 (fax)  
[www.railpassengers.org](http://www.railpassengers.org) | [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org)