



# PASSENGERS Voice

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## VIRGINIA SLATES \$3.7 BILLION RAIL TRANSFORMATION PROJECT



Amtrak Northeast Regional at the Main Street Station in Richmond, VA  
Photo Credit: AMTRAK

Great news for Virginia rail travelers, but also for the whole country: on Dec. 19, Governor Ralph Northam unveiled a stunning \$3.7 billion investment to jump-start rail expansion across the state.

Under the plan, aimed at transforming nearly everything about rail in Virginia, Virginia is taking the lead in building a new Long Bridge crossing over the Potomac from D.C. into Virginia, acquiring some CSX right-of-way (ROW) and also picking up the Buckingham Branch railroad, all with the aim of improving reliability, adding capacity and separating freight and passenger traffic.

The Long Bridge piece alone will eliminate a terrible choke point and obstacle to better service for years, adding new capacity for a system that's groaning for it.

The project will add frequencies, enable new weekend commuter service, and even make it possible to create real East-West passenger service across the state between Norfolk and Roanoke, connecting to

other services as well.

The state says the project is squarely aimed at economic benefits, just as we at Rail Passengers have been pointing out for more than a year.

In Virginia's case, the project should grow the economy \$2 billion annually.

It's also a model for how states, local governments and industry can come together to transform passenger rail nationwide, and mirrors a proposal your Association made to the Federal Railroad Administration last year.

We also continue to advocate for this approach for the rest of the country in our proposals for re-authorizing the five-year federal surface-transportation bill known as the FAST Act.

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**“It's a great example of what can be done when states, local governments and industry come together to work out a win-win for everyone.”**

Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers President & CEO on the Virginia rail investment



# RAIL PASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

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## VIRGINIA, from p. 1

You can read our proposals online at [www.railpassengers.org/blueprint](http://www.railpassengers.org/blueprint).

The Association says creating passenger-dedicated corridors clears the way for dramatic service improvements, and has called on Congress to create a federal grant program to let states and municipalities buy or otherwise acquire abandoned and underutilized corridors from freight railroads – just like Virginia has now done.

In testimony before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee last November, Rail Passengers CEO Jim Mathews repeated this proposal to create a grant program, along with a tax-credit to entice the private sector to donate underused or abandoned rights of way to state entities for passenger rail.

Outside of the Northeast Corridor, 70% of the host railroad ROW Amtrak uses is single-tracked, representing latent capacity that could be built out if the right mix of funding and incentives were put on the table.

We could see a program that requires a state match for federal dollars, and one that would make efforts at advance acquisition of ROWs also eligible for funding.

FRA has the talent, the insight and the vision to guide a new grant program aimed at preserving tens of thousands of miles of ROW around the country for passenger rail service.

This would help separate passenger and freight traffic, easing congestion, speeding service and permitting new frequencies.

## Upcoming Rail Passengers Association Events

Make Plans To Attend  
**RailNation:DC 2020 in Washington, DC**  
Sunday, March 29 thru Wednesday, April 1!

- **The Rail Passengers' 2020 Annual Advocacy Summit Is Monday, March 30; The 'Day on The Hill' & Congressional Reception Is Tuesday, March 31 And The Annual Council Business Meeting Is Wednesday, April 1**
- **Host Hotel - Embassy Suites Alexandria Old Town (At The King Street Metro & Alexandria Amtrak Stations) - Discounted Group Rate Rooms Are Now Available!**
- **Event Registration Is Now Open!**
- **Visit The Event Page For Complete Information & Details**

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

**Saturday, March 7**  
**2020 New York State Rail Advocates Annual Meeting & Lunch**  
**Schenectady, New York**

**Saturday, March 21**  
**2020 New England Rail Advocates Annual Meeting & Lunch**  
**New London, CT**

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!

# VIEW FROM THE HILL: 2020: THE YEAR AHEAD IN PASSENGER RAIL ADVOCACY

With a presidential election, transportation ballot measures and a surface transportation reauthorization on top of all the annual funding battles we face every year, 2020 will be filled with a lot of political unknowns. There's one thing that passenger advocates can count on: we'll be faced with a crowded political calendar and stiff competition for voters' attention.

When facing this much uncertainty, it's important to prepare yourself with the best tools at your disposal. With that in mind, Rail Passengers is looking ahead to the year in passenger train policy to give you a sense of what's coming—and the best opportunities for you to get involved in building a better train network in America!

**Join us for an advocacy briefing on February 17 at 8:30pm Eastern / 5:30 PM Pacific. Just dial-in at (312) 757-3121, Access Code: 451-126-413 or go to [www.RailPassengers.org/PaxBriefing](http://www.RailPassengers.org/PaxBriefing) to hear Rail Passengers staff guide you through the year ahead, hear everything that's happening in Washington, DC, and field your questions about Amtrak and transit service from across the US. We hope you'll join us!**

## REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Rail Passengers' 2020 program will be tied intimately to the surface transportation reauthorization process. There is a good chance that this bill will not achieve final passage in 2020, but our organization needs to articulate a clear set of principles and policies

Key Dates	
Date	Action
First Monday in February	President submits his budget (scheduled).
Not later than 6 weeks after the President submits the budget.	Committees submit views and estimates to Budget Committees (scheduled).
3 February 2020	First Presidential primary occurs (Iowa).
3 March 2020	Super Tuesday
April 2020	Congress completes action on the concurrent resolution on the budget (scheduled).
29 March – 1 April 2020	<b>Rail Passengers Day on the Hill</b>
May 2020	Annual appropriation bills may be considered in House.
June 2020	House completes action on annual appropriation bills (scheduled).
10 August – 4 September 2020	August congressional recess.
30 September 2020	FAST Act Expires
01 October 2020	Fiscal Year 2021 begins.
12 October – 6 November 2020	Election Day recess.
3 November 2020	Election Day 2020.
21 December 2020	Congress adjourns for 2020

for the rail and transit titles, and be able to incorporate them into our messaging around the must-pass FY 2020 appropriations bill. These principles include:

- Recognizing Importance of National Network to U.S.: Rail Passengers believes language should be included—with language added to recognize the importance of on-time performance to the long-term viability of the National Network—as a guiding principal for passenger rail investment in the surface transportation authorizing law, requiring Amtrak to provide train frequencies not less than what is currently being offered to all existing Amtrak communities .
- On-Time Performance and Fairness for Passengers: Given the dramatic rise in host railroad interference and passenger

delays, Rail Passengers is asking Congress to grant Amtrak a Private Right of Action, which would allow Amtrak ability to sue the freight railroads to enforce its statutory preference.

- Creation of a Right of Way Acquisition: Congress should create a federal grant program that would allow states and municipalities to purchase abandoned and underutilized corridors from freight railroads.
- Transit Oriented Development: Congress should create a permanent program that will allow Transit Oriented Development (TOD) commercial development with RRIF/TIFIA financing for projects stipulated by the Secretary of Transportation to have significant value capture to support the ongoing station and passenger operations,

# A BUSY 2019 FOR BRIGHTLINE SETS THE STAGE FOR EVEN BIGGER FUTURE

One million passengers, new stations in Florida, and an expansion in the desert - the soon-to-be rebranded Virgin Trains USA ended 2019 on a high note with a flurry of news items in the second half of the year that will set the stage for a very bright future for the 8-year old privately owned passenger rail operator. Revenue service has been in place since the beginning up 2018.

- Total ridership number nearly doubled from its first year in service and surpassed the million passenger mark, allowing the company to stay on pace with its goal of serving 3 million riders by the end of 2021 - which would be their third year in service. Company officials announced that they had crossed the 100,000 mark for a single month for the very first time in November - which was a big reason they were able to celebrate this achievement for FY2019.

- Ridership should take an even bigger jump after an announcement of deals with Boca Raton, Aventura, and PortMiami to build new stations in South Florida. The station in PortMiami, which could be open by the end of 2020, would be the first time an intercity rail system

has connected an international airport directly to a cruise port. This would give them six stations in South Florida as the company makes its way north.



Brightline Train

Advanced talks have been confirmed by both Brightline and Disney on a station in or near the Walt Disney World Resort theme park in Orlando. Brightline already has plans for a station at the Orlando International Airport and estimates that passengers could make the trip from Miami to Orlando in 3 hours. The second station would be part of a further

expansion plan for an 80-mile

connection between Disney and Tampa.

- Maybe the biggest news of the year, Brightline plans to break ground on their great western expansion later this year as they officially unveiled their plans for the 170-mile high speed connection between the Las Vegas Strip and Southern California that will take passengers back and forth in 90 minutes. The \$4.8 billion project is expected to be completed in 2023.

Reminder, Rail Passenger Association members receive a 10% discount on Brightline tickets.

## 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.
- **Our office call volume is particularly high right now, so please call us back or leave a message if we cannot get to you! We appreciate your patience during this time.**
- 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.
- **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.**

# FORT WORTH STATION VOLUNTEER OPEN HOUSE

On December 14, Rail Passengers staff visited in Fort Worth TX for the station volunteer open house. We had the great opportunity to spend three hours with residents talking about train service in Fort Worth and the value that a renewed volunteer program would bring to the community.

The current volunteer program in Fort Worth was started about 15 years ago but has been facing dwindling volunteer numbers in recent years. Mr. J.R. Price and Mr. Jerry Nunn have been diligently supporting the program for the past year or so and are looking forward to an influx of new volunteers to assist with the growing number of Amtrak, TexRail and TRE travelers thru the Fort Worth station. As a result, Rail Passengers partnered up with Amtrak, Trinity Metro and Downtown Fort Worth, Inc to publicize and promote the open house and we were rewarded with a very healthy turnout and 17 residents who submitted applications.

A very interesting scenario presented itself when two separate parent/



(Photo Credit: Carolyn Cokley)

child families stopped by the open house. Both mother/daughter and father/son rail enthusiasts stopped by with great interest in signing up as a family and sharing the pleasure and experience of volunteering together and doing something positive in their community. Unfortunately, at this point in time, Amtrak only accepts volunteers that are at least 18 years of age. We are working with Amtrak to clarify it's language to allow for younger teenagers to participate in

the program with permission from and under the guidance of their parent(s). Rail Passengers certainly sees the potential of recruiting younger members and Amtrak realizes how this could increase ridership.

The Fort Worth open house was very well received and is being used as a gateway to more station volunteer programs for unstaffed and staffed stations in Texas and Oklahoma.



## 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/join](http://railpassengers.org/join)  
or call 202-408-6382 to join!

# STOP

Looking for the latest in travel advisories and tips?

Be sure to read the **HOTLINE** each and every Friday.

[railpassengers.org/hotline](http://railpassengers.org/hotline)

# LOOK

## RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

### QUESTION...

**DO YOU LIKE SITTING WITH STRANGERS FOR MEALS ON THE TRAIN?**



**A. Yes** - Yes, the more the merrier.

**B. No** - No, I value my alone time.

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).

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 January, we asked: **"Was your last Amtrak train On Time or Delayed?"**

**63%** of the respondents said that their last trip was on-time, while the remaining **37%** replied that they were delayed.

#### Poll comments included:

- **Campbell Sadeghy** - "I use the Heartland Flyer pretty regularly and it's almost always on time. I can't recall the last time I took an Amtrak train that was delayed" and Carole Kucharski commented "Hiawatha 98% on time. Excellent route and crew." On the other side, Terry William Hamilton stated that "my last Coast Starlight trip was delayed by many hours" Though not every delay is a bad thing as Jim Little points out, "I typically love delays -- more time to enjoy the train ride!"

## #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](http://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).

## #VIEWSONATRAIN

We are sharing many of the great photos we have received on Instagram ([www.instagram.com/railpassengers](http://www.instagram.com/railpassengers)).

We are also still looking for more submissions. Photos can be submitted via Instagram, Facebook or Twitter depicting your experience as "The Rail Passenger" and your views from a train.

Rail Passengers Association staff will select images, which we will use as part of our new visual identity on our website, in our monthly newsletter, on social media, and more!

When submitting your photos on social media, be sure to use the hashtag [#ViewsOnATrain](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/ViewsOnATrain) and tag [@RailPassengers](https://www.instagram.com/RailPassengers).

## 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.



### HILL, from p. 3

creating a coordinated development-transportation plan.

- Equipment: 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.
- Passenger Rail Account Funding Levels: Rail Passengers is calling for a significant increase in passenger rail investment to address decades of stagnant funding.

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS + BALLOT MEASURES

The election cycle for the 2020 general election will last a punishing 332 days, with the House scheduled to adjourn as early as October 2nd and the Senate slated for October 9th. As a 501c3, Rail Passenger won't be engaged directly, but there will be a number of practical considerations flowing from the

elections this year:

- The condensed calendar will highly pressurize Congress' ability to move appropriations and authorizing bills in a timely fashion.
- Candidates have already started campaigning on the need for multi-trillion-dollar infrastructure investments, many of which contain passenger rail and transit proposals. There will be more to talk to representatives and candidates about this at in-state and in-district town halls and meet-the-candidate events.
- Rail Passengers will create a comprehensive list of transit-friendly ballot measures to rally around this summer, which are often the best way to target money to rail projects in quickly and efficiently.

*Join us at the 2020 Rail Advocacy Briefing to hear even more about the campaigns we are planning for the year ahead!*



# ON THE MOVE

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

- Orange County Transportation Authority's board selected Garden Grove **Mayor Steven Jones** as chair. He will be responsible for transportation improvement projects and public transit in

Orange County, California.

- **Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz** appointed former state DOT commissioner **Charles Zelle** chair of the Metropolitan Council, the authority that oversees Metro Transit's rail and bus services in the Twin Cities.
- The Bay Area Rapid Transit's



(Photo Credit: OCTA)

OCTA Chairman Steven Jones

board elected District 7 director **Lateefah Simon** president and District 2 director Mark Foley vice president for 2020.



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