



# PASSENGERS Voice

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## AMTRAK CHAIR: MISSION AHEAD OF PROFIT

In a November guest editorial in Railway Age magazine, Amtrak Chair Tony Coscia hit back against the notion that Amtrak's primary mission should be profitability and defended the long-term role of long-distance routes in a national system, a welcome departure from top executives' previous public stances.

"Mobility is not a moneymaker if you have to pay for 100% of the cost of getting from point A to point B," Coscia wrote, citing airlines, cars and buses. "Even our roads and interstates, which road advocates used to love saying were 'user funded,' require billions in subsidies each year, with the feds now providing more than \$157 billion in general revenue subsidies for the insolvent Highway Trust Fund since 2008."

"The costs of intercity passenger rail just happen to mostly run through Amtrak, and as a result the full expense of our mode is easier to see," Coscia continued. "Given this, Amtrak funding has always been a target by critics and competitors that like to forget the subsidization that occurs across all modes."

He went on to reiterate the vision for the railroad's future that



Tony Coscia, Amtrak Chair  
Photo Credit: Amtrak

Amtrak laid out during our Rail Passengers' September webinar, a 2035 route map that includes all of today's long-distance services plus additional regional corridors.

Long-distance trains "provide essential transportation and contribute to both economic opportunity and quality of life in places that have long ago been abandoned by the airlines and bus carriers," Coscia said. "By creating corridors around the nation that are interconnected by current long-distance routes, we can enhance the viability of long-distance service and make the national network more essential, not less."

It is gratifying to see the thousands of hours of Congressional advocacy by Rail Passengers staff and volunteers on behalf of the National Network find its way into Amtrak's company line.

## HARD WORK AHEAD FOR 2021 RECOVERY

By Jim Mathews  
President & CEO

For many of you, this past year has brought upheaval, anxiety, and even personal tragedy. And yet I've been personally touched by how many of our members have called us or checked in on us to see how we're holding up.

And even more impressively, our members have responded to our challenges in unprecedented numbers, whether through the generosity of donations and contributions or by using our online tools to relentlessly press our congressional representatives to support passenger rail, sending nearly 16,000 messages to Congress. Thank you!

2020 began with high hopes. Another record for Amtrak ridership was in sight, and we enjoyed bipartisan congressional support, especially among Senators. Amtrak sent Congress an aggressive Fiscal 2021 budget request that included passenger-focused reforms, a long-distance working group with states, a dedicated fund to start new corridor services without robbing National Network resources and even \$1 billion for new long-distance equipment. Less

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# 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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Alicia Guinn (Ext. 3205), Membership Associate  
Joseph Aiello (Ext. 3210), Field Coordinator  
Madi Butler, Communications Manager  
Donna Thomas, Production Editor

This issue has news through December 16, 2020.

## RECOVERY, from p. 1

than two months later, Amtrak ridership evaporated. We closed the year with long-distance trains running only three times a week and our rail service in tatters.

With “Amtrak Joe” Biden entering the White House, we’ll have an Administration that understands how passenger rail boosts our economy and can jumpstart recovery, that’s committed to what they’re calling the “Second Rail Revolution.”

But “Amtrak Joe” has no magic wand to wave over Congress where the funding proposals that really count are built, especially in the Senate. Our work now must go into an even higher gear. We have important fights ahead on the National stage and across the country. Nationally we need to bring back daily service, better food, and the money to get that done. And we need

broader representation on the Amtrak Board. Regionally we have a whole host of important issues from coast-to-coast and everywhere in-between.

With your help, we’ll secure passenger rail and public transportation investments around the country to help our pandemic-battered economy recover.

Making progress will take sustained daily and weekly effort from all of us – your hardworking professional staff in D.C. and all of you speaking up for your town and your service. One phone call is not enough. One email is not enough. The future of passenger rail is more frequencies, daily national service, and a more connected America. But we have to make it through the coronavirus crisis just to get there, and we’ll all need to do that together. Are you with us?

## 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.



## THE RAIL PASSENGERS STORE!



**We want to thank** all of our members, fellow advocates, and rail fans who made the launch of our brand new Bonfire store an amazing success.

**We sold over 550** masks, shirts, and hoodies for our limited edition “I’d Rather Be on the Train” campaign.

If you missed out this time, have no fear - we are going to have more to offer early in 2021. Stay tuned to [bonfire.com/store/railpassengers/](https://www.bonfire.com/store/railpassengers/) in January!



# VIEW FROM THE HILL: WITH AMTRAK AND TRANSIT AGENCIES ON THE BRINK, CONGRESSIONAL NEGOTIATIONS FALTER

With Amtrak and transit agencies hurtling towards a fiscal cliff and tens of thousands of rail transportation jobs in the balance, Congress has passed yet another week-long extension as talks falter over the shape of the next coronavirus relief package.

Transportation advocates have organized around this latest coronavirus aid proposal as a vehicle to restore daily service across the National Network and avoid severe cuts to transit service in cities across the U.S. Rail Passengers allies on Capitol Hill are telling us that the current bipartisan compromise—a \$908 billion package in total—includes \$1 billion for Amtrak and \$15 billion for mass transit systems, which would help avoid further cuts and layoffs for rail operators struggling with the coronavirus pandemic and anemic ridership.

## **‘GANG OF 908’ TRANSPORTATION RELIEF PROPOSAL: \$45 BILLION**

- Amtrak: \$1 billion  
*[Requested: \$2.4 billion];*
- Transit: \$15 billion  
*[Requested: at least \$32 billion];*
- Airlines: \$17 billion –  
*[Requested: \$25 billion];*
- Airports: \$4 billion –  
*[Requested: \$13 billion];*
- Private buses: \$8 billion –  
*[Requested: \$10 billion].*

Given the delta between the requested funding and the funding provided in the \$908 billion proposal, it's likely that congress intends to work with the incoming

## *Legislative Update*

Biden Administration on another aid deal in 2021. According to an internal document being passed among negotiators on Capitol Hill, the funding would be used to “support public transit systems across the country that will be used to prevent furloughs, meet operating needs, and keep systems running; and “allow Amtrak to continue to provide existing service and prevent additional furloughs through March 31, 2021.” The second point is further indication that congressional leaders are banking on another relief package in the spring to restore daily service to the long-distance and state-supported routes.

However, the Trump Administration has offered a counterproposal that only includes \$31 billion for transportation. It is not yet clear how that money would be divided among the various modes, or whether Amtrak would be a recipient; the Trump Administration has repeatedly proposed eliminating Amtrak's long-distance services.

Further complicating factors, there is talk of yet another short-term extension which would push negotiations through Christmas. With Amtrak and transit agencies warning that further furloughs and layoffs are imminent without additional financial aid, tens of thousands of frontline transportation workers have reason to be concerned this holiday season.

“The MTA and transit agencies across the nation have been devastated by the pandemic,” said Pat Foye, chair and CEO of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, during a December 9th virtual press conference held by leaders from nine major transit agencies. “I repeat there will be no economic recovery regionally or nationally without significant investment in mass transit. This is not a red or a blue issue — it's a jobs issue.”

This delay does give passengers another week to ensure that **Amtrak and transit are included in the final passage!**

**Hurdles Remain**  
The bigger threat to negotiations remains whether liability protections for businesses from coronavirus-related lawsuits will be included, and how long the liability shield will extend.

“It's pretty difficult,” said Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT), a leading member of the bipartisan group of senators drafting the compromise legislation. “We've got a week left to be able to resolve all the issues [on a] very broad area.”

Senator John Thune (R-SD) struck a more pessimistic tone.

“My sense is that they're not going to get there on the liability language,” Thune told reporters. “They're just not going to be able to thread the needle.”

With disagreement over key

The Rail Passengers Association needs supporters like you to help make a difference. Through your partnership we can continue to:

- **Advocate** for passengers of commuter, regional and inter-city rails;
- **Collaborate** with grassroots supporters, annual partners and affiliated state-level passengers' organizations;
- **Educate** tourism bureaus, lawmakers, communities and departments about the importance of rail transportation;
- **Inform commuters**, lawmakers and other rail fans about the latest rail news and happenings that impact them.
- **Because of people like you**, Rail Passengers Association advocates on behalf of a nation of passengers and communities who depend on rail transportation for their livelihood and well-being.



As a small charitable organization, we rely on the generosity of others.

Your support ensures staff has the ability to work closely with constituents, communities across the country and Congressional

leadership to reinforce grassroots efforts and ensure rail passengers voices are heard loud and clear in Washington, DC.

**There are easy ways to give:**

1. Make a donation online by visiting [railpassengers.org/donate](http://railpassengers.org/donate).
2. Call the DC Office at 202-408-8362 for assistance in making a donation via credit card.
3. Recommend a grant from your donor advised fund to the Rail Passengers Association.
4. Ask your Human Resources Department about matching your membership dues or recent donation

## Upcoming Events

Go to [railpassengers.org/events](http://railpassengers.org/events) for more information

**Saturday, January 23, 2021,  
10:00 AM**  
**Oregon Passenger Rail Summit:  
Connecting Communities**

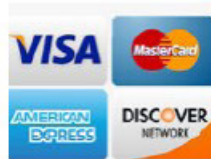
**Thursday, January 28, 2021,  
Time: TBD**  
**2021 Southwestern  
Rail Conference**

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!

## 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

# VOLUNTEER NOTES

*Our volunteer members are the heart and soul of the Association.  
We wanted you to hear from a couple who help out  
the staff on a daily basis.*

## RICH ROSENTHAL

As a volunteer to the Rail Passengers Association (RPA), I am able to learn about and participate in all RPA initiatives in direct support of our nation's passenger rail services. These include helping with Membership Drives, Constituent Networking and Communications, Legislative Outreach and Programming, and Stakeholder Development and Fundraising. Among the most rewarding aspects of my volunteer work is serving as the first contact source for members and stakeholders who are calling RPA for information, updates, or just conversations about their rail travel experiences or their current areas of interest. It is through these calls that RPA is able to tap into and respond to the pulse of our rail passengers community. As a long standing member of RPA and as a frequent Amtrak and commuter rail patron I am delighted to work with a team of incredibly dedicated, pragmatic, and selfless professionals at RPA who place the priorities of rail passengers front and center across the political, stakeholder, and affinity organizations every single day.

## JOSHUA HIRSCHFELD

I started volunteering with RPA in July, and through the few months that I have been here, I've been impressed with what the Association is able to do. I was almost immediately put to work helping to conduct research on the economic impact of Amtrak services in many states, which was then used in Jim Mathews' testimony to Congress on September 9th to argue for maintaining daily service along the Amtrak long distance network. It amazed me then, and still does now, how important the work that the staff of this Association does. Despite the ongoing pandemic, the efforts of the Rail Passengers Association have resulted in Congress becoming more aware of the problems facing Amtrak, as well as elevating the voices of rail passengers to a much wider national stage. It not only takes the work and dedication of our staff, but of our members too, who in no small part have helped bring the Association to the position that it's in today. I look forward to continuing my work with the Rail Passengers Association into the new year and beyond as we continue to work on behalf of rail passengers across America.

The Rail Passengers Association raised over \$16,000, **far surpassing our \$12k match challenge**, for this year's Giving Tuesday.

#GIVING  
TUESDAY

our fight to restore daily Amtrak service, encourage greater investment in passenger rail and public transportation and to support our essential front-line workers as they

Thanks to all of you who donated - we will continue

navigate the coronavirus response.

**HILL**, from p. 3

passages, the bill is still very much in flux, with no guarantee that the Senate will pass a coronavirus relief package at all unless they hear from their constituents. We need your help to stiffen the spines of your members of Congress between now and next week!

"Five years from now when we look back at this time,

will it be the moment we widened the mobility divide or will it be the moment we thrived in the face of challenges? The federal government needs to answer the call," said Robert Powers, general manager of San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit.

**PLEASE ACT NOW!**

## 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).

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND NOTICES

- Check out the new **Frequently Asked Questions** page on our website to help answer popular questions about your membership.
- **Production and mailing of the printed version of the Passengers Voice newsletter has temporarily ceased.** The Passengers Voice will still be available at [www.railpassengers.org](https://www.railpassengers.org) and as a downloadable PDF. For those of you who have paid extra to receive a mailed copy of the newsletter, we will extend your subscription by the number of months we are interrupted.
- While the Rail Passengers staff is working remotely, **we are unable to print permanent membership cards, dues/donation acknowledgment letters, or membership/benefits information.** Luckily, you can find information about your Rail Passengers membership by visiting [www.railpassengers.org](https://www.railpassengers.org) and selecting "My Account" to log in or create an account with us.

## QUESTION...

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO, IN REGARDS TO PASSENGER RAIL, IN 2021?**

**Find our post on Facebook and Twitter to give us your thoughts!**

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).

## RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

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.

Due to Facebook's recent format change, pages are no longer allowed to post polls.

We are working on a new way to bring you this content. Stay tuned for more!

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Name:** Jim Clark

**Location:** Waynesboro, VA

**Why did you become a member?:** Ever since growing up along a Long Island Railroad line when I was a kid, I have always thought railroads were an essential means of transportation. I have experienced the decline of this most sensible service and am grateful to the Association for its advocacy of passenger rail. Ergo, I became a member.

Jim has been a long-standing member of the Rail Passengers Association, residing in the town of Waynesboro. He recently published an article about Amtrak service in the Lodger, a local publication he writes for. As opposed to a selfie, Mr Clark gave us the following photo and description. "This is my



Amtrak Cardinal

(Photo Credit: Jim Clark)

favorite photo I have taken of Amtrak's Cardinal at the Blue Ridge Tunnel on the Buckingham Branch alongside the entrance of the original tunnel that will open soon as a recreation trail."

The "Member Spotlight" is a monthly section where we highlight the Association's most important asset: YOU. To be considered, email Madi Butler at [mbutler@naprail.org](mailto:mbutler@naprail.org).

HAPPY  
*Holidays*

**FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS ... WE WISH YOU A  
HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

*From your friends at...*

**Rail Passengers**



# JOIN THE DIGITAL CONVERSATION:



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