



Dear RUN members and friends.

First, let me first thank those of you who have already contacted your elected Congressional Representatives and U.S. Senators. Despite our efforts as well the work of other rail advocacy organizations, Amtrak is still planning to reduce long-distance passenger rail service to three days a week starting October 1, 2020. While the U.S. House of Representatives passed its consolidated appropriations bill for 2021 (H.R.7616 & 7617) on July 31 which included additional funding for the National Passenger Rail Corporation, Amtrak is still planning to cut long-distance service. On August 11, it announced that several criteria would be used for restoring long-distance service next year, as well as sufficient federal assistance estimated to be any least \$3.5 billion for fiscal 2021.

This threat to our national train network is the greatest the nation has faced in Amtrak's history. Merely cutting the days that the trains operate from seven days a week to three will almost certainly lead to the complete elimination of those trains.

So what can you do? There is still time for action, and it may be our last chance to save this part of our nation's mobility. As both the House and Senate are currently in recess and unlikely to pass a fiscal year budget for 2021 in a timely manner, we must insist that they include specific language in the continuing budget resolution to require Amtrak to keep running long-distance trains every day. The funds provided for the National Network of the National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak) should be expressed conditionally on Amtrak continuing to operate all services of the National Network daily; seven days per week, except for the two trains that operated three times per week during the Fiscal Year 2020. We also urge you to spread the word in your local media, both traditional and on social media.

When writing to your Congressional member or Senator or talking with their staff, please also remind them that it is vitally important to include nationwide mass transit operating assistance in any new COVID-related budget bills. Our mass transit systems are the economic engines that move regions. Without vibrant mass transit systems, people will not be able to return to work after COVID. There is no way everyone can switch to an automobile - both for congestion reasons, as well as air quality. In New York, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is the economic engine that moves the city and the region, and is also an economic engine of the entire nation, as 10% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is produced there. The loss of fares, tolls, and dedicated taxes has given the MTA and other transit systems a tremendous budget gap, and the MTA and other transit agencies have said if they don't receive federal assistance, everything is on the table, including mass layoffs, service cuts, fare hikes, and delays in the capital projects, which would improve service, safety, and accessibility.

For more information regarding Amtrak Long-Distance Trains and Transit in Crisis see the attached document below.

Thank you very much. Be well and stay safe.

*Richard Rudolph*

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# Amtrak Long-Distance Trains and Transit in Crisis

## The Issue

In April Amtrak received \$1 billion in emergency funding to mitigate lost revenue and to continue operations under COVID restrictions. In early May, Amtrak stated it needed an additional \$1.475 billion to continue operating under COVID, and disclosed plans to cut its workforce by 20 % and possibly some long-distance service.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-amtrak-idUSKBN232283>

In mid-June, Amtrak announced its plan to cut all long-distance (LD) trains to tri-weekly, this, in response to a reduction of about 95% of ridership, although LD trains fared better than corridor and State-supported routes. While ridership and revenue remains suppressed because of the pandemic, long-distance ticket revenues climbed 71%, from \$6.8 million to \$11.6 million, between April and May. Operating with approximately the same frequencies, Northeast Corridor billing rose about 60% from \$1.5 million to \$2.4 million, and state supported trains generated less than a 50% increase, from \$2.3 million in April to \$3.5 million in May. So existing long-distance service, mostly operating seven days a week, provided almost double the May revenue of Corridor and state-supported operations. August 11, Amtrak revealed criteria for restoring service.

<https://trn.trains.com/news/news-wire/2020/08/11-amtrak-releases-criteria-for-restoring-long-distance-service>

Passenger railroad says three metrics will determine when to restore daily operation on a per-route basis after the planned Oct. 1 cut to tri-weekly service...

— Public health: COVID-19 hospitalizations must be stable or declining as of Feb. 15, 2021.

— Future demand: Advance bookings for June 2021 must be at least 90% of the available seat-miles or room-miles of the figure for June 2020, as of Feb. 15, 2020. Calculations will take into consideration caps on ticket sales to promote social distancing, as well as other COVID-related measure, which begins in September, must be at least 90% of projections in Amtrak's 2021 operating

— Current performance: Ridership in the first quarter of Amtrak's 2021 fiscal year, plan. Only Auto Train is scheduled to remain in daily operation after that date.

Amtrak notes that the plans for the reductions and subsequent restorations are dependents upon sufficient federal assistance estimated to be at least \$3.5 billion for fiscal 2021.

The threat to our national train network is serious; possibly the most serious the nation has faced in Amtrak's history of almost 50 years. Merely cutting the days that the trains operate from seven days a week to three will almost certainly lead to the complete elimination of those trains within the next few years.

Research has already demonstrated that it costs more to run a train on a tri-weekly schedule, than to run it every day. Amtrak knows that from past experience. The decline in ridership that will result from such service reductions will send all of our long-distance trains into a death-spiral.

## **What Can You Do?**

This is the time for ACTION, and it may be our last chance to save that part of our mobility. We strongly urge you to contact your Senators and Representatives in Congress and tell them that we need strong legislation to require Amtrak to keep running the trains every day. Current proposals are not strong enough. Tell your local elected officials to contact the local members of Congress and tell them the same thing. Also, we urge you to spread the word in your local media, both traditional and on social media. If you don't act now, you might not have a train for much longer.

Don't think that your trains are safe if you live in the Northeast or in a state (like California or Illinois) that sponsors Amtrak trains or corridors. Amtrak continues to serve the nation because members of Congress from outside those places are willing to see that there is money to keep the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and other Amtrak lines going, because there will also be a train that serves their own state, even if only once a day. The bi-partisan alliance that keeps Amtrak going serves the Northeast, areas near other major cities served by state-sponsored corridors, and the rest of the country, where the long-distance trains run. Most Democrats, along with some Republicans in Congress, have been mutually-supportive in keeping Amtrak going throughout the country. If the long-distance trains no longer serve their riders every day, members of Congress could withdraw their support for further Amtrak funding, to the detriment of corridors everywhere, including the NEC and its branches. You may not lose your train directly, but you could lose it indirectly.

It is not only Amtrak riders who will suffer. Millions of people use transit for everyday transportation, especially in our biggest cities, in the Northeast and other parts of the country. In our major cities, transit is the engine that drives the cities and their surrounding regions. Whenever transit has shut down in New York or other big cities, the results have been devastating. Connectivity between Amtrak and local rail transit is a vital part of the mobility networks in those regions. Members of Congress who represent districts served by long-distance trains will not look favorably on grants for transit in faraway cities, if they lose the only useful train that serves their own constituents. Saving the long-distance trains could save your transit, too, especially with hard times coming as a result of the COVID-19 virus.

RUN has advocated strongly for an enhanced Amtrak and better rail transit in the United States and Canada for the past 25 years, and we continue to do so. Our members believe in all passenger trains, local rail transit, and connectivity between the two. We are all of like mind on those issues, and the members of our Board are seasoned advocates with long experience fighting for and improved Amtrak, as well as more and better rail transit. We urge you to join RUN and fight alongside us. Our trains are on the line, and they could come off!

## **Action for Congress**

Amtrak could argue that it is not using the funds in question to reduce service, because merely announcing service changes do not more than a nominal amount, so the funds in question are not needed for that purpose. Amtrak would also argue that the service is being reduced to conserve scarce dollars, so the appropriation will actually last longer than if the trains continued to run every day. That argument would give Amtrak an opportunity to implement the cuts, while claiming that the actual use of the money at issue is a factual dispute, which requires litigation to determine whether or not the cuts are permitted under the provision. That could keep the cuts in effect for up to two years, by the end of which time the host railroads would claim the slots formerly occupied by Amtrak trains and continue the fight against restoration to daily.

A better wording would be: "The grants provided in this section for the National Network of the National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak) are expressly conditioned on Amtrak continuing to operate all trains of the National Network daily; seven days per week, except for the two trains that operated three times per week during the Fiscal Year 2019. Amtrak is also directed to make a best effort to increase operation of those two trains, the Cardinal and the Sunset Limited, to daily operation no later than September 30, 2021.

I call your attention to 49 U.S.C. Sec. 24706(b)(1)(A), which states in pertinent part that Amtrak is allowed to discontinue service during "the first month of a fiscal year if the authorization of appropriations and the appropriations for Amtrak are not enacted at least 90 days before the beginning of the fiscal year..." Under that provision, Amtrak can discontinue service, because the new fiscal year starts in less than two months.

Therefore it is imperative that Congress either repeal that subsection, or at least include language like this:

"Notwithstanding the provisions of 49 U.S.C. Sec. 24706(b)(1)(A) or any other provision that would allow Amtrak to reduce or discontinue any passenger train service, Amtrak is hereby directed to continue operating every train on a daily basis that operated on a daily basis on March 1, 2020 or the year preceding that date. This direction is made to Amtrak in consideration for grants made to Amtrak for Fiscal Year 2021 under this heading."

## **Talking Points**

We with the Rail Users Network, encourage all of you to contact your state and federal representatives and urge them to provide much-needed funding to keep transit and intercity rail alive. The following bullets are provided for you as speaking points:

- Public transportation is necessary to safely and securely get workers to and from their jobs.
- Unlike highways which were and are never associated with profit, public transportation has always operated with the barest of public funding.

- Public transportation has suffered severe funding setbacks due to the nationwide shutdown in our economy accompanied by the massive downturn in patronage.
- Money is desperately needed to keep the systems functional now and for future use.
- Intercity rail is barely a rounding error in the federal budget, yet, it has been from its inception the subject of low regard as an outdated form of public transportation used only by vacationers.
- The economic gain for the cities and towns, states, and regions is many times greater than the money spent to run passenger rail. This has been demonstrated route by route, yet remains invisible to most politicians on all levels.

## Resources

Additional information may be found on the following websites:

[RailUsers.net](http://RailUsers.net)

[RailPassengers.org](http://RailPassengers.org)

Check your state for state rail advocate organizations.

Check [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov) to find your representatives and contact information. This is available for local, state, and federal elected officials.

Call them and let them know you want to keep transportation alive now and for the future

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