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Passenger Rail In 2025: States Will Need To Maintain Passenger Rail Momentum

Jim Mathews | President & CEO

Rail Passengers Association

Washington, DC

Jan. 21, 2025

WHO WE ARE

The Rail Passengers Association:

Since 1967, Non-Profit and Non-Partisan



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A disclaimer:

I am offering my observations as a political professional. Any discussion about political tactics, strategies, or outcomes reflects only our assessment of the current state-of-play and is not a partisan endorsement of any particular politician or legislation.

WHO WE ARE

The Rail Passengers Association:

Since 1967, Non-Profit and Non-Partisan



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We're the leading voice for the more than 40 million rail passengers in the U.S., working for a modern and robust national rail network delivering **safe, efficient, and affordable rail travel for everyone.**

We do this because it makes communities safer, more accessible, and more productive, improving the lives of everyone who lives, works, studies, and plays in towns all across America.

WHO WE ARE

The Rail Passengers Association:

Rigorous, Professional Public Policy Research



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We work with local, state, Federal, and tribal leaders and planners, local legislators, congressional members and staff, and businesses.

Our staff produces rigorous economic-benefits studies, white papers, educational materials, model legislation, and bill language. We also testify before Congress and agencies, vote in advisory bodies, and comment on rulemakings.

WHO WE ARE

The Rail Passengers Association: Speaking For Grassroots Nationwide



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At the same time, we've mobilized a grassroots network of 127,000+ donors, members, and supporters nationwide!

Our goals are to improve and expand conventional intercity and regional passenger train services, support higher speed rail initiatives, increase connectivity among all forms of transportation, and ensure safety for our country's trains and passengers.

A REMINDER OF WHERE WE ARE

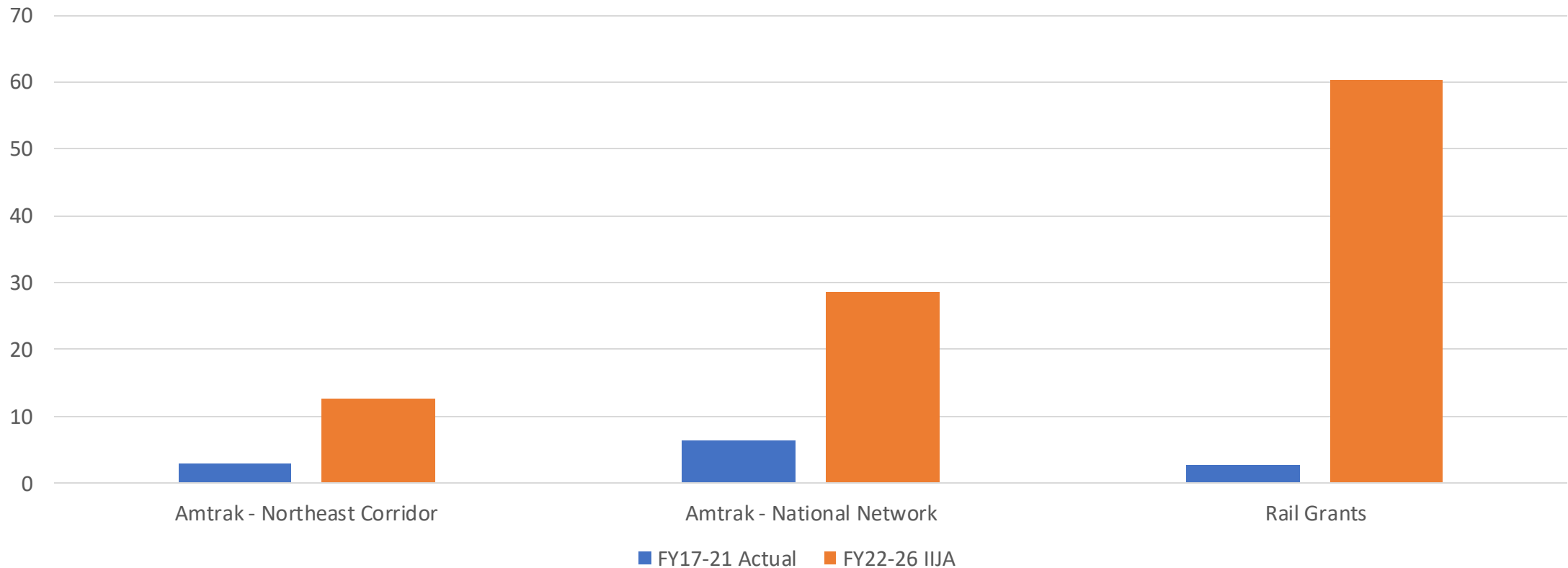
Truly Historic U.S. Passenger Rail Funding:

The Current Five Years Versus The Prior Five Years



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Rail Funding (Billions)



[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

From FY22-FY26

\$66B in total funding

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

From FY22-FY26

\$36B* in total funding

Amtrak

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements

Railroad Crossing Elimination

Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail

Restoration & Enhancement

[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

\$22B

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

\$19B

[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

\$5B

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

\$5B

[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

\$3B

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

\$2.5B

[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

\$36B

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

\$7.5B

[ADVANCED APPROPRIATIONS]

\$250M**

[FULLY AUTHORIZED FUNDS]

\$250M



* \$34.5 billion for grant programs; additional \$1.5 billion is authorized for FRA operations and R&D – not included in this graphic.

** Grants for Restoration & Enhancement (advanced appropriations portion) are funded through “takedowns” from Amtrak NN account; not included in totals to avoid double-counting.

A REMINDER OF WHERE WE ARE

Truly Historic Public Sentiment:

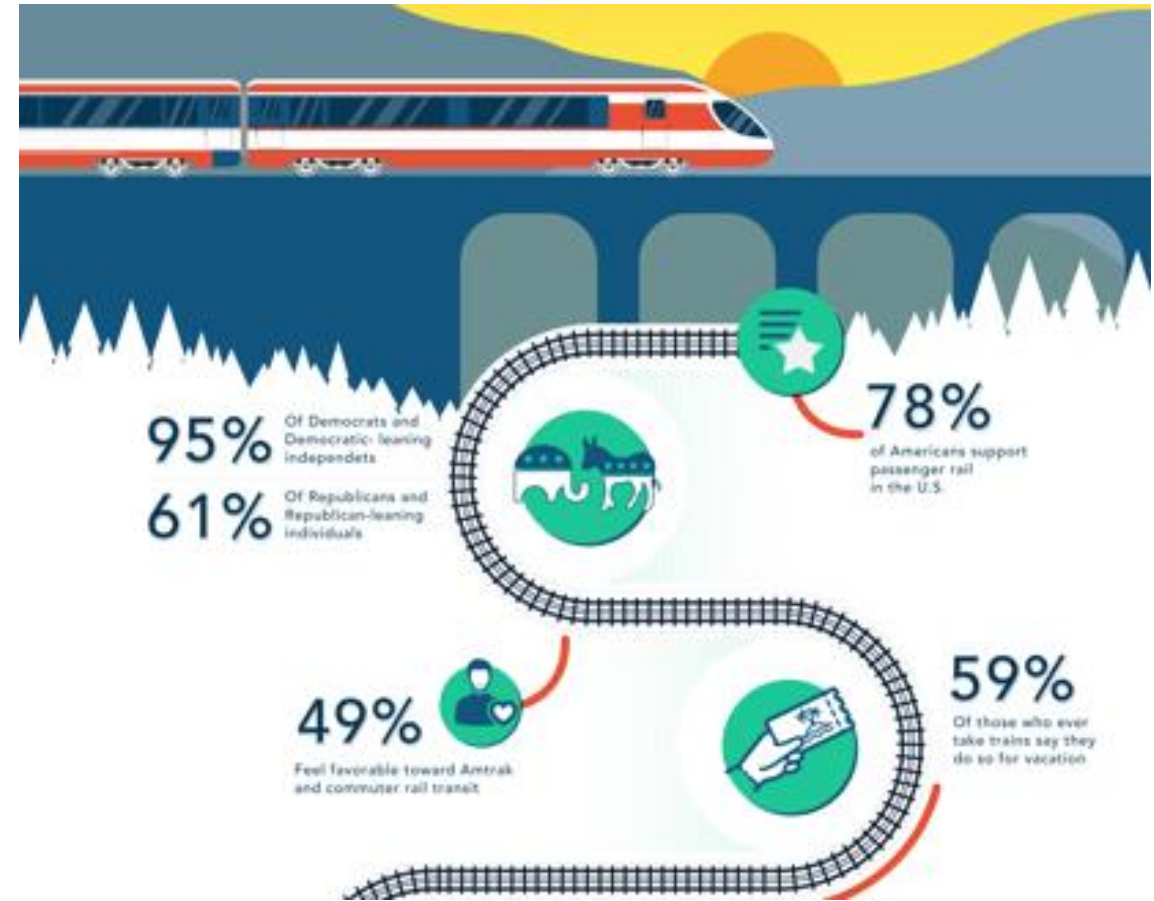
Broadly Bipartisan Support For More And Better Trains



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Whether they vote Republican or Democrat, most Americans want more and better trains to more places for more people

- **78%** support U.S. passenger rail
 - **95%** of Democrats and Democratic-leaning voters
 - **61%** of Republicans and Republican-leaning voters
- **57%** support high-speed rail
- **60%** would spend \$100 billion or more improving passenger rail





Notable Congressional Losses: Rail Allies Lost On Both Sides

- **Senate:**

- Bob Casey (D-PA) defeated by hedge fund CEO **Dave McCormick (R)**
- Banking Committee Chair Sherrod Brown (D-OH) lost to **Bernie Moreno (R)**, a close ally of Trump
- Key Appropriator Jon Tester (D-MT) defeated by **Tim Sheehy (R)**, who previously had ties to Big Sky Rail Authority and has already publicly supported the proposed new service

- **House:**

- Rep. Mike Garcia (R-CA-27) lost to **George Whitesides (D)**, a former Virgin Galactic CEO who was chief of staff for NASA
- Rep. Anthony D'Esposito (R-NY-4) lost his bid to **Laura Gillen (D)**
- Rep. Marc Molinaro (R-NY-19) lost to **Josh Riley (D)**
- Rep. Brandon Williams (R-NY-22) lost to **State Sen. John Mannion (D)**
- Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA-8) lost to **Rob Bresnahan (R)**

ELECTION 2025

Cabinet Picks Jumble The Map:

Special Elections, Gubernatorial Appointments



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- Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) to U.N. (Special Election)
- Rep. Mike Waltz (R-FL) as NSA (Special Election)
- Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), withdrawn as Attorney General pick, will not take his 119th Congress seat (Special Election)
- Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) as Sec. of State (Gov's appointment)
- Vice President J.D. Vance (Gov's appointment)



Secret Ballot Picks Institutional: Sen. Thune's Win Offers Important Insight

- **Sen. John Thune (SD)** was the “institutionalist” choice for Senate Majority Leader.
 - A reliably rail-friendly vote, he has also pledged to maintain the power of the filibuster
- **Sen. John Cornyn (TX)** pledged speedy enactment of Trump's agenda if elected majority leader
 - Hoped to quickly confirm Trump's cabinet and judicial appointees, empowering committees and rank-and-file membership to drive the legislative agenda, prioritize spending and tax bills
- Some of Trump's high-profile backers weighed in to back **Sen. Rick Scott (FL)**, including Elon Musk
 - Scott would have likely prioritized tax cuts and **deep** spending cuts
- **Secret ballot results: 29 Thune, 24 Cornyn, 0 Scott**



ELECTION 2025

House Control Is Wafer-Thin: 61 House Freshmen Headed To DC



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Districts With 17.4% of Annual Contract Spending Set to Change Hands New cohort of 61 lawmakers responsible for \$136 billion in procurement

FY23 Contracting Total	Incumbent and District	New in 119th Congress
\$31.9B	Kay Granger (R, TX-12)	Craig Goldman (R)
27.4B	Abigail Davis Spanberger (D, VA-07)	Eugene Vindman (D)
10.5B	Cori Bush (D, MO-01)	Wesley Bell (D)
7.0B	Bill Posey (R, FL-08)	Mike Haridopolos (R)
5.8B	John P. Sarbanes (D, MD-03)	Sarah Elfreth (D)
5.8B	Jennifer Wexton (D, VA-10)	Suhas Subramanyam (D)
3.9B	David J. Trone (D, MD-06)	April McClain Delaney (D)
3.6B	Doug Lamborn (R, CO-05)	Jeff Crank (R)
3.0B	Brandon Williams (R, NY-22)	John Mannion (D)
2.7B	Andy Kim (D, NJ-03)	Herb Conaway (D)
135.6B	Total	

Source: Bloomberg Government
Notes: Data as of Nov. 11

Bloomberg Government

- Single-digit margin of control
- On Nov. 13, House Republicans agreed to modify the 'Kevin McCarthy' rule enabling single Member to trigger no-confidence vote; no-confidence now requires 9 backers (the original 8 Freedom Caucus members + 1)
- Roughly **60 House freshmen** headed to Capitol Hill

ELECTION 2025

2025 Calendar, The First 100 Days: A Shutdown Already Looms

- Jan. 3: New Congress meets
 - Speaker election in House
 - Members sworn in, rules adopted
 - Senate organization
- Jan. 20: Presidential inauguration
 - President, Vice President sworn in
 - Nominations for Cabinet-level and other political appointments made official
 - Dozens of executive orders signed Day One
- Late February: Trump Administration likely to forgo budget proposal
- Mid-March: Potential government shutdown?



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A NEW ADMINISTRATION

White House 2025 Agenda:

Early Hints Suggest Transportation Is Low Priority



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- President-elect assembles team
 - Transition team vets and shepherds cabinet picks, other officials
 - Executive orders prepared for day one
- Finalize FY25 Omnibus/CR (+ extend debt limit?)
- Immigration
- Tariffs
- Extend Trump tax cuts
- *...[Followed by a few dozen other things]...*
- Then, finally, establish USDOT priorities for rail programs?

ELECTION 2025

'Personnel Is Policy':

Part One – DOT Nominee Duffy's Voting Record



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'Personnel Is Policy':

Part One – DOT Nominee Duffy's Voting Record

113th Congress Votes

- Voted YES to reduce the Operating Grants to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation by \$34 million
- Voted YES to prohibit the use of funds to support any Amtrak route whose costs exceed two times its revenues
- Voted YES to prohibit the use of the funds for high-speed rail in the State of California or for the California High-Speed Rail Authority

114th Congress

- Voted to eliminate all authorized Amtrak funding
- Voted NO on the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2015
- Voted YES to eliminate all of Amtrak's operating funding
- Voted YES to eliminate all of Amtrak's capital funding
- Voted YES to prohibit the use of funds to support Amtrak's route with the highest revenue loss per rider

- Voted YES to prohibit the use of funds to support any Amtrak route whose costs exceed 2 times its revenues
- Voted to prohibit the use of funds by the Department of Transportation to take any actions with respect to the financing of passenger rail projects along Florida's East Coast
- Voted YES to prohibit the use of funds by the Department of Transportation to authorize exempt facility bonds to finance passenger rail projects that cannot attain the speed of 150 mph
- Voted YES to prohibit the use of funds by the Department of Transportation to make a loan in an amount that exceeds \$600 million under the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act

115th Congress

- Voted YES to eliminate a \$900 million allocation for the upgrade of an Amtrak rail line between Newark and New York City
- Voted YES to eliminate \$1.1 billion in operating and capital funding to Amtrak

ELECTION 2025

'Personnel Is Policy':

Part Two – DOT Nominee Duffy's Senate Hearing



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'Personnel Is Policy':

Part Two – DOT Nominee Duffy's Senate Hearing

- **Committed to Sen. Cantwell (D-Wash.) to continue work on projects with existing DOT grants**
 - Also noted he'd heard from Senators that projects are moving too slowly, and he would work to speed delivery.
- **Committed to Sen. Schatz (D-Hawaii) to keep political considerations out of new grant applications**
- **Agreed with Sen. Moran (R-Kan.) that providing rail service to rural communities was important and must continue**
- **Offered qualified support to Sen. Kim (D-N.J.) for continuing the giant Gateway Tunnel project**
- **Acknowledged to Sen. Kim that his voting record appeared anti-rail, but was only reflective of his constituents**
 - He went on to state that he understood that he would be representing the entire nation as Secretary of Transportation, including communities that relied heavily on Amtrak.
- **Agreed with Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.) that work on the Brightline West public-private partnership corridor between Los Angeles and Las Vegas should continue**
 - Told Sen. Rosen that it sounded like a great way to get people off the congested Interstate 15.
- **Agreed with Chair Cruz (R-Tex.) that grant application ratings should be made public**
 - This is something IJJA's Corridor ID program was intended to do

A NEW CONGRESS

Ambition Will Meet Reality:

Many 'Must-Pass' Measures On Tap For Year One



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Year One

- Trump tax cut extension
 - Senate will be able to rely on Reconciliation (once per calendar year)
 - Repeal unspent IRA and IJA funds as pay-fors? "Red" states who will benefit could be crucial to defending these funds
- **FY26 discretionary budget cuts?**
- Cruz/Graves May 2024 letter suggests California HSR in for a fight
 - Roughly \$700 million in unobligated PFAs for CAHSRA
 - Amtrak SOGR, Brightline West, VA, and NC funding would *seem* to be less exposed
- Debt limit extension
- House and Senate margins mean Republican caucuses will have to find new discipline, or pull over Dem votes



A NEW CONGRESS

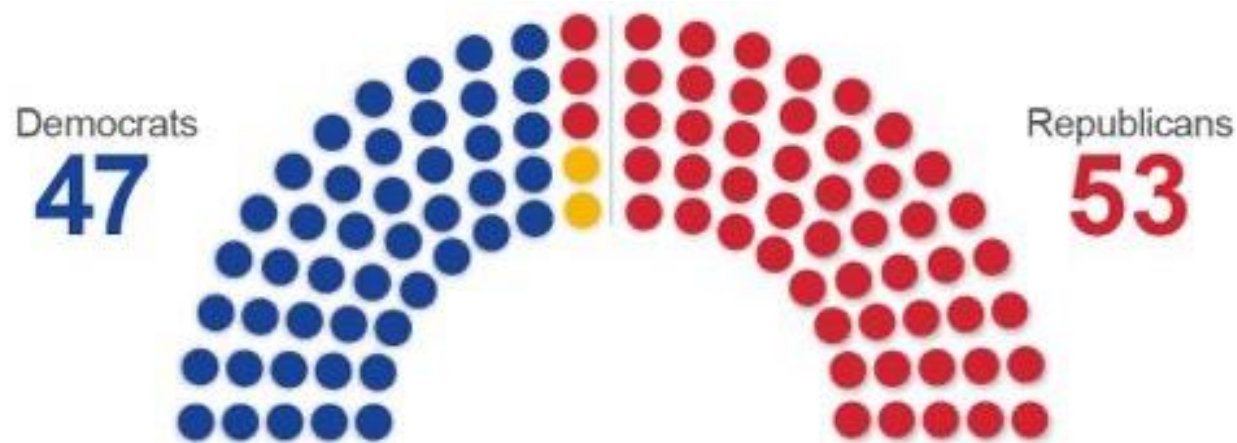
Ambition Will Meet Reality:

GOP Must Work With Slim Majorities For The 119th

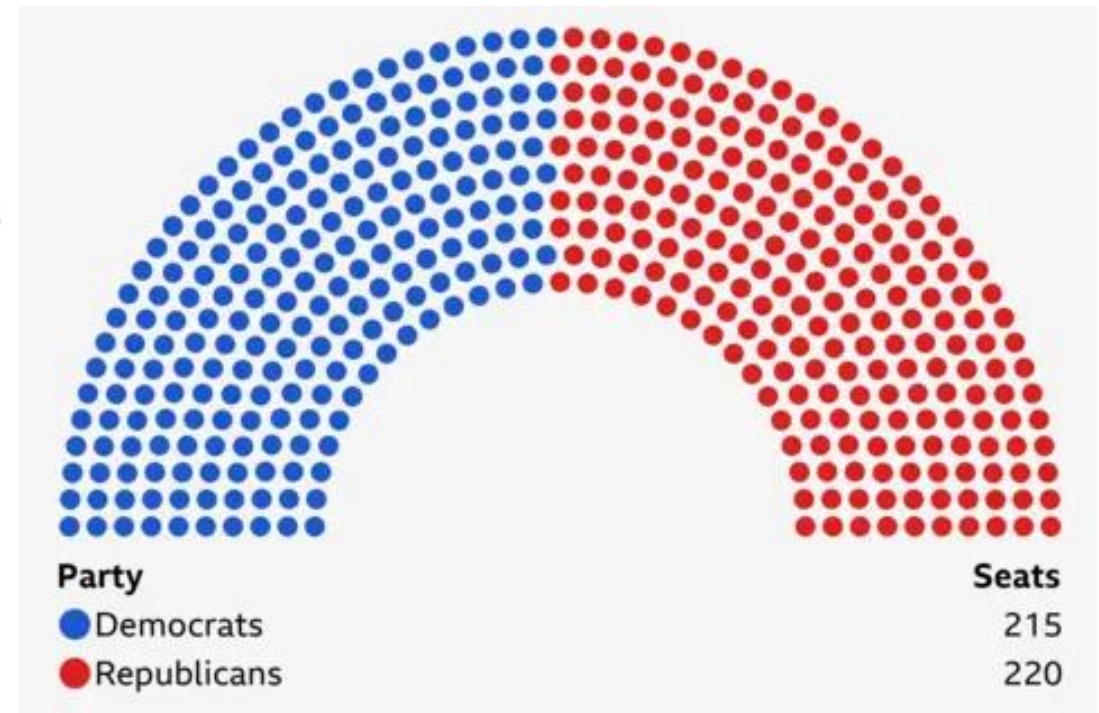


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Senate



House



Note: Yellow circles reflect independents who have caucused with Democrats.

A NEW CONGRESS

Ambition Will Meet Reality:

Radical Policies Face Tight Margins, Heavy Calendar



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Year Two

- Surface Transportation Reauthorization – the IJA/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – will go through Committee process
- Highway Trust Fund ran a \$27bn deficit in FY24, projected to grow to \$46bn by FY32
 - Unlikely that a bill that could pass in this GOP-led House can secure the 60-vote supermajority needed in the Senate
 - Filibuster remains in play
 - Dems less inclined to negotiate in the 119th



Open Questions:

IIJA Clawbacks, Attitudes Toward Class Is

- Status of unallocated rail funds?
 - \$10bn remaining in FSP
 - \$1bn in outstanding FY24 FSP-NN NOFO
 - FY24 NOFO responses were due Dec. 16; **awards highly unlikely**
 - FRA may move ahead with FSP PFAs that (attempt to) earmark FY25+26 funding
 - How much of Amtrak \$22bn in SOGR has been obligated? (*A trick question...*)
- What is Congressional appetite for rescission of IIJA funds to fund other priorities?
 - Quantify current exposure
- VP Vance's approach to freight rail safety
- Musk influence on transportation policy



Trump's Path to Enacting Policies



Executive
action
alone



Congressional
legislation
required



Likely
court
challenge

Possible action

Possible action	Executive action alone	Congressional legislation required	Likely court challenge
Tariffs			
20% tariff on all imports	●		●
60% tariff on Chinese imports	●		●
200% tariff on imported vehicles from Mexico	●		●
Fed policy			
Demote or replace Jerome Powell*	●		●
Enact more presidential control over rates		●	●
Deporting undocumented migrants			
Deploy National Guard	●		●
Invoke Alien Enemies Act of 1798	●		●
Reinstate Trump policies invalidated by Biden	●		●
Deregulation			
Reverse Biden-era limits on energy projects	●		
Exit the Paris Climate Accords	●		
Ease regulation on cryptocurrency industry**	●	●	
Taxes			
Extend 2017 tax cuts		●	
Lower corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%		●	
Eliminate federal income tax		●	

* Naming a new Fed chair requires Senate confirmation



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- *Loper Bright* checks FRA and, potentially, STB; but it also opens a broader swath of administrative actions to legal challenges
- A consistent application of the principle outlined in *Loper Bright* would require more deregulatory actions to originate in Congress, **where they would have to navigate narrow margins of control in the Senate + House**



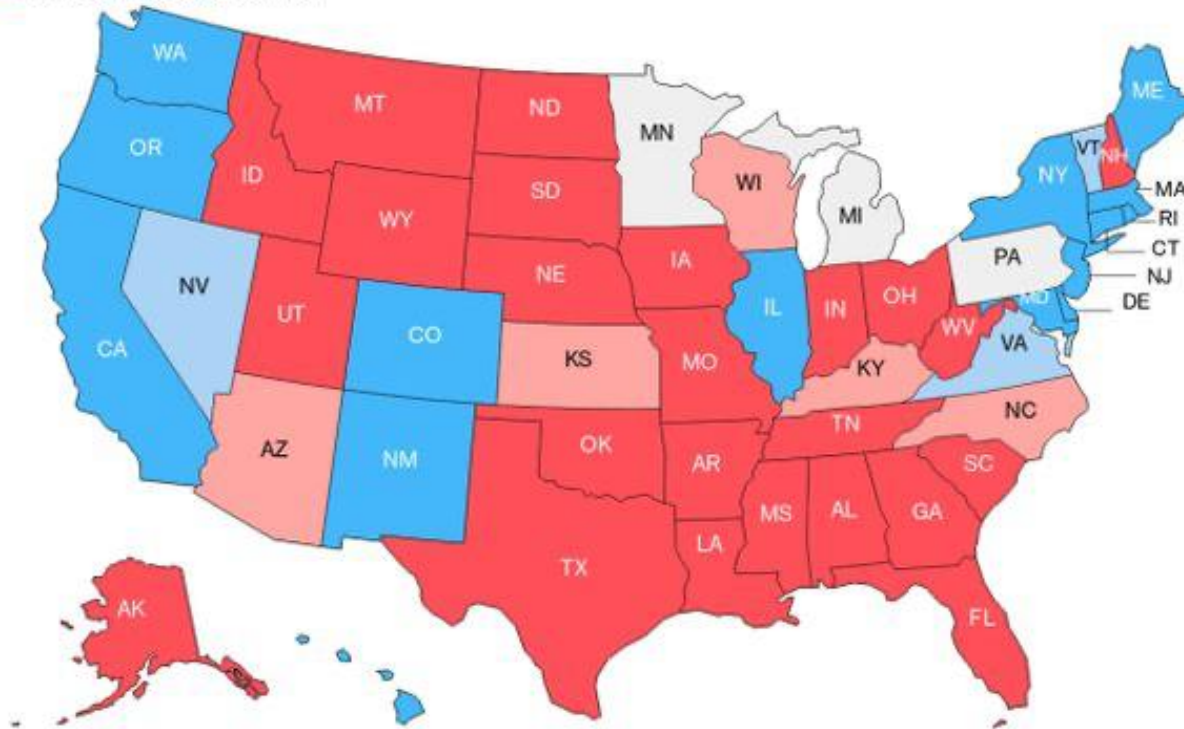
THE WAY FORWARD

Whither The Non-Federal Match?:

Political Shifts At The State Level Could Clip Progress

Partisan Control of State Legislatures, Governorships

- Full GOP control
- GOP legislature, Democratic governor
- Split legislature
- Democratic legislature, GOP governor
- Full Democratic control



Source: Ballotpedia

Note: Alaska's coalition government is GOP dominant. Outstanding results from Pennsylvania could change legislative majorities.

Bloomberg

- Democratically controlled legislatures have driven growth in non-Federal matching for Federal grant awards
- 40 state legislatures under the control of a single party:
 - Republicans will run 23 of them
 - Democrats' total falls from 17 to 15

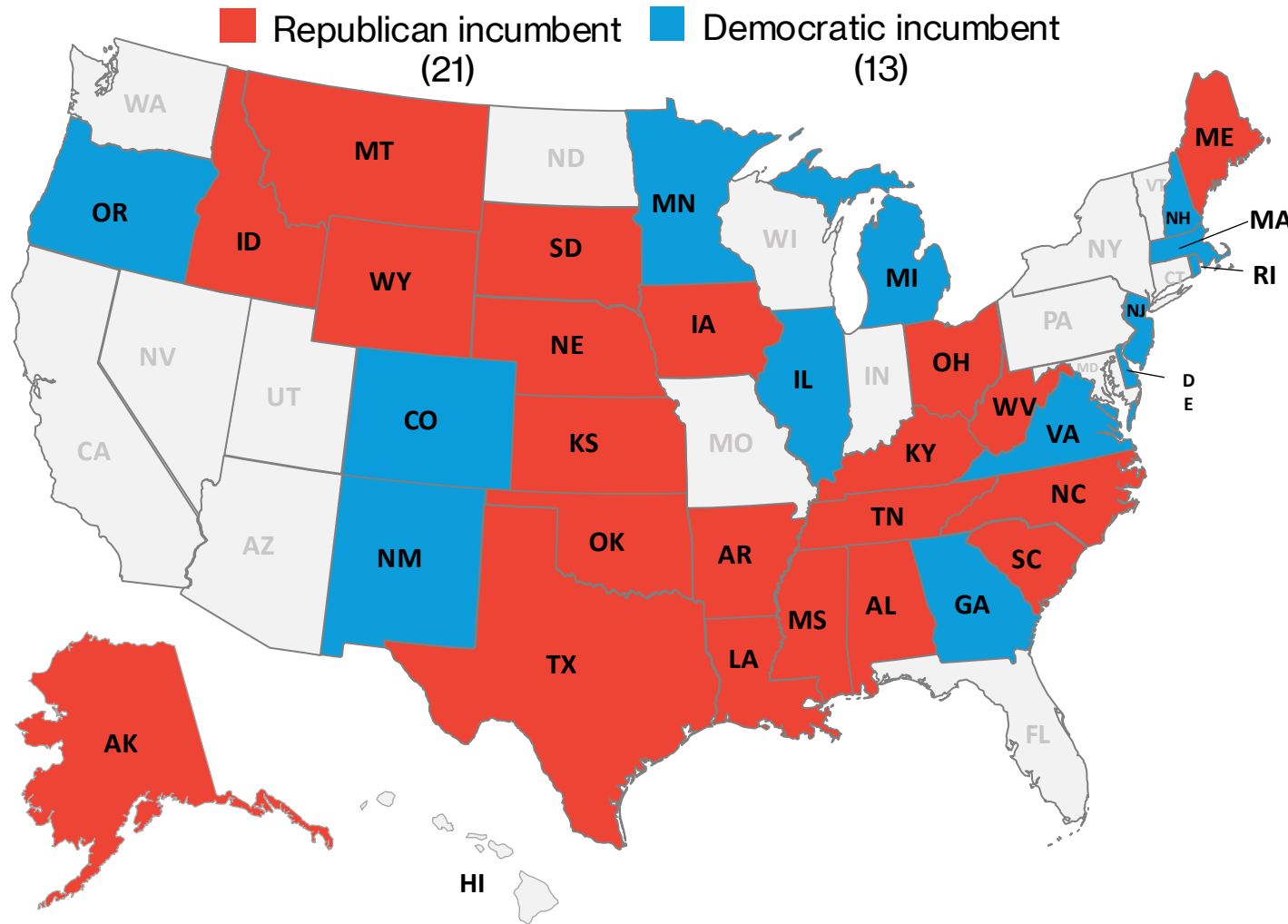
THE WAY FORWARD

The 2026 Senate Race Map:

Outlook Is Relatively Stable...With A Catch



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- Few or no “vulnerables” to flip in the Senate
- The next two years could, however, shape (or reshape) public sentiment and potentially drive a shift in the odds for these seats
- If history is a guide, the House will lean Blue

THE WAY FORWARD

The Economic-Benefits Case:

Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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An advertisement for Amtrak. On the left, two staff members, a woman and a man, are smiling. They are wearing white shirts and dark ties. The man is holding a tray with a cup. They are standing in front of a building entrance with a sign that says '1870'. On the right, there is a dark blue background with white text. The text reads: 'CONTRIBUTING \$7.4 BILLION TO THE U.S. ECONOMY, PLUS TIPS.' Below this, in smaller text: 'Lori Mock and Nykolas Alford serve up smiles for Amtrak® customers at Weidmann's Restaurant in Meridian, Mississippi.' At the bottom right, the Amtrak logo is shown, followed by the word 'AMTRAK' and the website 'amtrak.com'.

Small Towns Across America Collect Amtrak's 'Profit'!

THE WAY FORWARD

The Economic-Benefits Case:

Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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THE WAY FORWARD

The Economic-Benefits Case:

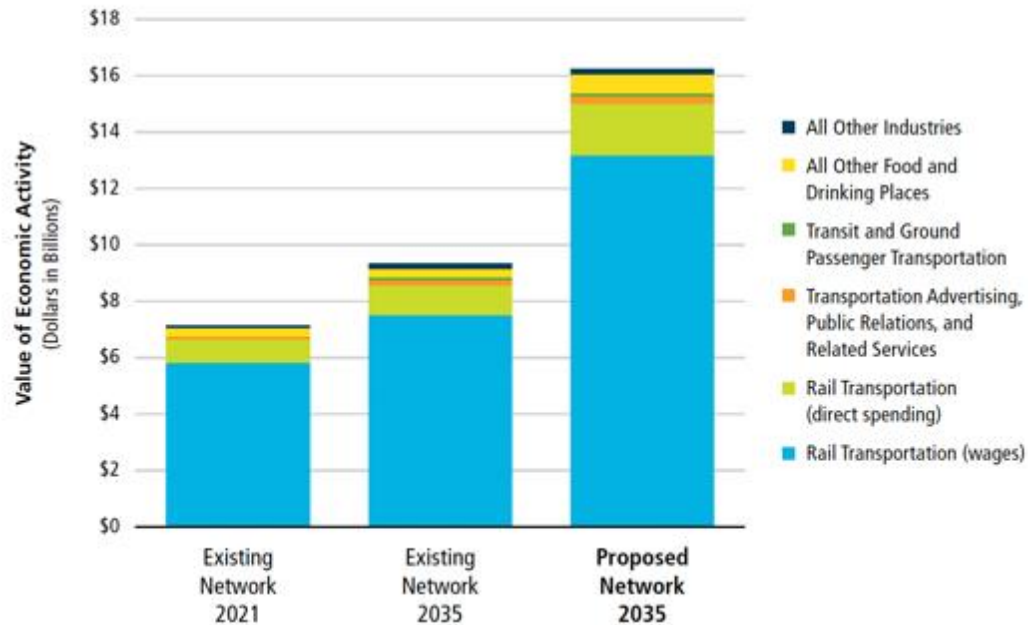
Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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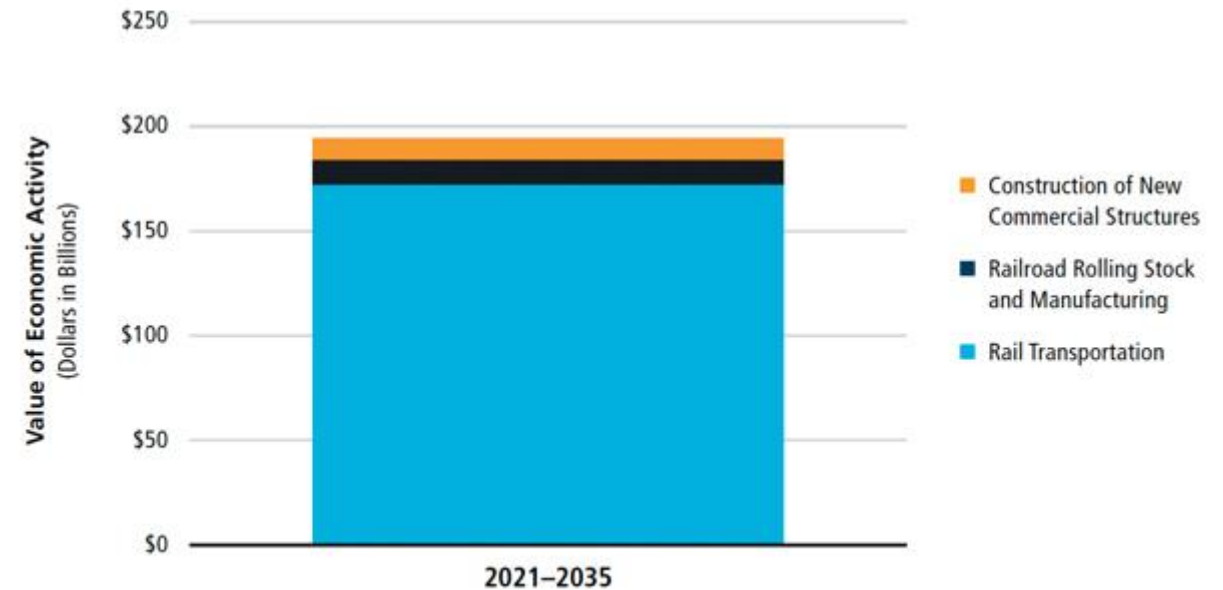
The value of economic activity in other sectors generated by the operation of the corridor vision is substantial, assuming a ramp-up over fifteen years.

Figure 1. Value of Economic Activity Generated by Operating Cost Expenditures



The impacts from capital investments to construct improvements and equip the new network are even more substantial during an assumed build-out phase.

Figure 2. Value of Economic Activity Generated by Capital Cost Expenditures



THE WAY FORWARD

Illustrating The Multiplier Effects:

Identifying The Ways Communities Profit From Rail



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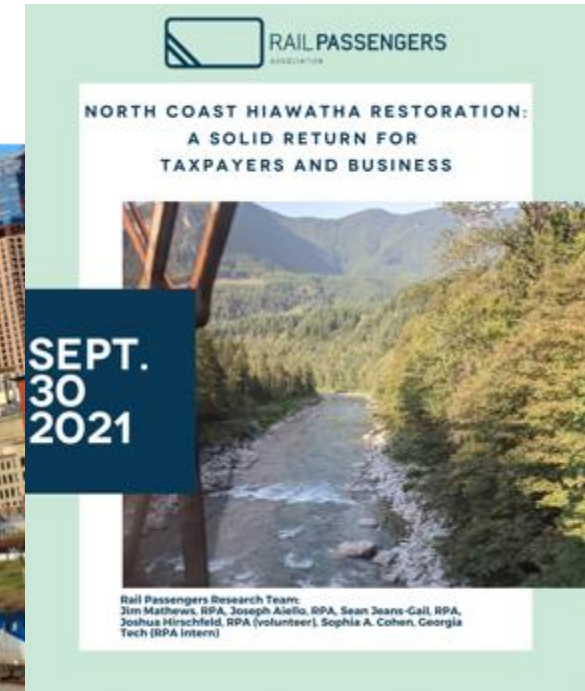
- RPA model is a collaboration with the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott National Center
- Assess DIRECT and INDIRECT benefits (visitor spending, tax receipts, job creation, etc.)

Bustituted:
The Socioeconomic Impacts of R
Southwest Chief Service Over Ra

Prepared By:

Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang, Research Professor, University of Southern Mississ
Caleb Prine, Graduate Research Assistant, University of Southern Missis
Amit Tripathi, Undergraduate Student Researcher, University of Souther
James Abram Zumwalt, Director of Policy Research, Rail Passengers Asso

Dec 2018





wages paid



business tax impacts



household purchases



local and import purchases



wages paid



household tax impacts



...About Those Multiplier Effects

- Rail Passengers licensed IMPLAN to estimate benefits
 - IMPLAN is a calculator for multiplier effects of changes in final demand for one industry on all other industries within a local economic area
 - IMPLAN uses a matrix of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)
 - Universities, Fortune 500 Companies, and the US Forestry Service all rely on IMPLAN
- **Using RPA's 2021 *Borealis* Projection As An Example:**
 - New Visitor Spending: ~\$7 million, annually
 - Avoided Annual Highway Mx Costs: ~\$32.5 million
 - Avoided Traffic Accidents: ~\$1.8 million
 - Operations & Maintenance: ~\$47 million

THE WAY FORWARD

FRA-Led Long-Distance Study:

Restoring Routes, Growing Service To 43 Million People



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- ✓ 43% increase in rural access to long-distance service
- ✓ 22% increase in higher education institutions served
- ✓ 18% increase in access to National Parks
- ✓ 16% increase in access to major medical centers

- *Rail Passengers Association* participated heavily in this work
 - Study sent to Congress Jan. 20, 2025, is part of the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
- FRA ‘Preferred Network’ would create dramatic growth in service nationwide
 - Nine million more rural residents, two million more students, 600 more educational institutions, 73 National Parks, 73 additional Medical Centers
- Rural and underserved states get particular attention in this new set of route designs— two more states, 102 new stations in small communities

Sources: Federal Railroad Administration, Rail Passengers Association

Questions and Discussion



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