

# Build a world-class passenger rail network



Amtrak's national network of long-distance and state-supported routes, along with the Northeast Corridor, provides essential transportation connections for local communities. While the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the previous reauthorization, Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, laid the groundwork for a funding and policy framework to support a robust passenger rail system, further work is needed.

The next surface transportation reauthorization should preserve the existing national and regional passenger rail networks and improve service by investing in rail infrastructure, ensuring on-time service, and expanding access to operating funds for long-term support. These investments are costly and occur over many years and therefore require the same stable, sustained, multi-year funding that highways have received for the last 70 years.

At the same time, policymakers must build the state and multi-state rail commission capacity to build out a world-class passenger rail system, while passing and enforcing laws that enable passenger rail to operate efficiently and compete for riders across the country.

## Policies to improve the state of the system

- 1. Provide Americans with more passenger rail options by allowing new rail providers into the market.** For new providers to enter the market, Congress would need to provide access to the existing rail network, rail equipment pool, and clarity on liability and insurance needs.
- 2. Restructure roles and responsibilities between Amtrak, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and Surface Transportation Board (STB).**
  - Amtrak should be responsible for the oversight of every federally funded long-distance route and for operating the NEC. It would work with state rail commissions on planning, identifying funding needs and priorities, and conducting outreach to communities.
  - Amtrak and new service providers should be responsible for the state-supported routes, as well as managing stations and marketing passenger rail routes.
  - The FRA would oversee national planning for passenger rail infrastructure, network connectivity, and safety standards. It would set standards for stations and maintain a registry of station features and conditions. The agency would also facilitate information sharing between freight and passenger rail providers and enforce regulation and oversight of both sectors.

- The authority of the STB would include initiating independent proceedings, expediting cases with additional funding, and ensuring access to data for decision-making. Congress needs to ensure the STB has the funding and authority to move actions expeditiously and in compliance with legal deadlines.
  - Include condition targets for off-system bridges
3. **Update the requirements for the Amtrak Board to ensure that the Board is representative of the people that it serves.**
    - Board members should have demonstrated interest in the entire system, be riders themselves, and represent the vast geographic diversity of the communities that Amtrak serves.
    - In the interest of bringing a broad range of experiences and stakeholders to the Board, a term limit should be instituted.
  4. **Create a national equipment pool for passenger rail equipment, standardize rail procurement practices, and establish federal funding maximums for equipment purchases to protect the federal taxpayer from the added cost of over-customization.**
  5. **Promote development near rail stations to optimize rail service and maximize the development potential.** Prioritize passenger rail projects for funding where stations are located within developed areas, where the development is a mix of commercial and residential or is planned to be, is connected to local transit, and includes value capture.

For questions or more information, please contact our policy team at [info@smartgrowthamerica.org](mailto:info@smartgrowthamerica.org)



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