



TrainRiders NORTHEAST

Changing the way the Northeast travels

Founded in 1989

Box 4869, Portland, Maine 04112 (207) 879-7245 (TRY-RAIL)

March 6, 2025

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Senator Tim Nangle, Senate Chair
Representative Lydia Crafts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Support of TrainRiders Northeast for Passage of LD 847, Resolve, Directing NNEPRA to Apply for Federal Funding for the Purpose of Identifying the Rail Corridor Connecting Portland to Orono as an Intercity Passenger Rail Corridor

Dear Senator Nangle and Representative Crafts:

I am the President of TrainRiders Northeast. TrainRiders is the grass roots citizens' organization that was the driving force behind the initiation of the Downeaster passenger rail service between Brunswick and Boston and which continues to strongly support that service to this day. It also supports improvements and expansion of passenger rail service in Maine and throughout the Northeast, where such expansion is rationally justifiable given current and projected economic and social conditions. I was a member of the inaugural board of directors of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority ("NNEPRA") and a member of the Rail Use Advisory Council ("RUAC") formed to study the Lower Road in which capacity I authored the minority report for that RUAC.

TrainRiders Northeast strongly supports the passage of LD 487. That bill directs Maine's Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) to apply for funding through the federal corridor ID program to obtain the designation of the rail line between Portland, Maine, through Auburn, Lewiston, Waterville, and Bangor to Orono as an intercity passenger rail corridor. This designation would allow Maine to access federal funds to pay for a portion of the cost required to improve that line for passenger rail service. The reasons for TrainRiders' support include the following:

1. In 1989, the Maine Legislature enacted the State Railroad Preservation Act in which they found that **"a viable and efficient rail transportation system is necessary to the economic well-being of the State"** and that the State of Maine **"must take active steps to protect and promote rail transportation to further the general**

welfare.” 23 M.R.S. § 7102. Subsequent legislative support for these findings has proven their truth as shown, for example, by the vast success of the Downeaster service on the passenger side and the continuing survival of and need for the freight rail service provided on State-owned lines in northern Maine. **Passage of LD 487 is just the type of “active step” that is referenced in that Act.**

2. LD 487 and other bills already filed in the current legislative session will test whether the Maine legislature retains what was formerly a steadfast commitment to both passenger and freight rail in this State. **Failure to pass LD 487 would constitute a reversal of long-standing State policy and the loss of an opportunity to provide a vital tool for economic development, environmental progress, and travel choices for all Maine residents (but particularly for those in the central and northern portions of the State), as well as for visitors to Maine.**
3. Passenger rail service in Maine only extends to Brunswick, requiring many residents to travel up to 300 miles to access it. The Downeaster already attracts passengers from the Province of Quebec, the Canadian Maritime provinces, and elsewhere who must travel even further to use that service. **Many individuals in Maine and other regions lack the means to travel the considerable distances necessary to utilize the Downeaster service. These individuals are deprived of the ability to use that service, which, if they are Maine residents, they already support with their tax dollars.**
4. Passenger rail service creates economic benefits in those communities where it stops or is easily accessible. **A 2024 study by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) suggests that an investment in Amtrak services results in economic benefits that are at least 4 times the amount of that outlay** (the RPA studies cited in these Talking Points are accessible in the Informational One-Pagers found at <https://railpassengers.org/happening-now/events/railnation-dc-2024/day-on-the-hill/2024-legislative-materials/> and copies accompany this letter). **A February 2005 report commissioned by NNEPRA (the last one prepared for that Authority) concluded that even in its early years when it terminated in Portland instead of Brunswick, included only 4 round trips a day instead of the current 5, and had a top speed of 60 mph instead of today’s 70 mph, the Downeaster: (a) generated \$2.87 million of new direct visitor spending in Maine (an average of \$277 per visitor) each year, plus \$2.264 million in indirect business sales and \$762,000 in personal income for Maine workers annually; (b) provided service that was cheaper than using a car or plane, saving Maine residents \$470,000 per year, which savings resulted in about \$800 thousand in business sales annually; and (c) encouraged \$1.94 million in construction activities that resulted in \$1,284 million of business sales and \$442,000 in personal income. Not quantified in that report were increased property values in station communities resulting from the Downeaster service. However, the Downeaster’s current geographical scope limits all of those benefits to southern Maine communities.**
5. **Most of northern Maine is rural. An RPA study concludes that 19% of Americans live in rural communities and drive 33% more miles than urban residents, but they experience**

49% of the traffic fatalities in the United States. Passenger rail travel is very safe. The RPA notes that during the past 15 years, only 40 passengers have died while onboard trains, including commuter trains and Amtrak, and that passenger rail is 17 times safer than riding in a car

6. **Extending passenger rail service northwards would provide many Maine residents and other travelers with a transportation choice they may not now be able to access.** The availability of this choice is most critical to those who do not have access to a car or, in some instances, other modes of travel on the road, and the importance of that choice increases as our population ages. It is equally important to those whose disabilities make traveling by car, bus, or other modes difficult or impossible, and those who choose not to purchase a car or simply cannot afford to do so.
7. **Passenger rail travel is less challenging to the environment than travel by car or airplane, and depending upon the circumstances, other modes of transportation.** According to the RPA, passenger rail is 45% more energy efficient per passenger mile than cars, 45% more efficient than light trucks, and 34% more efficient than domestic airline travel, and produces up to 83% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than driving and 73% fewer emissions than flying. According to a 2022 Federal Railroad Administration study of travel between certain city pairs, rail, and buses can each produce fewer CO2 emissions than the other, depending on the route involved. Transit now represents 49% of Maine's greenhouse gas emissions, so passenger rail has a significant role to play in reducing those emissions in our State.
8. **Passenger rail makes much more efficient use of land than highways and airports, reducing sprawl and encouraging rational development.** Thus, the RPA concludes that it takes 16 lanes of highway to carry as many people per hour as just a single two-railroad track and 300 miles of railroad uses less land than a single commercial airport. Studies show that passenger rail also results in clustered development around stations, resulting in more walkable and livable communities.

For all of these reasons, as well as others, this Committee should vote out LD 874 as "Ought to Pass".

Sincerely,



F. Bruce Sleeper, President
TrainRiders Northeast
fbsleeper@trainridersne.org



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

The National Network: A Foundation for American Mobility

Amtrak's National Network forms the foundation of passenger rail service in the U.S., connecting congested urban areas and bringing economically viable mobility to rural areas and small towns, where it's needed even more. It is important to note that many of these areas are becoming more isolated from major cities as regional airline and intercity bus service disappears. Their importance has been proven by their resilience in the face of the pandemic, with Amtrak's Long-Distance Routes last year reaching 90% of their pre-pandemic ridership—**despite service cuts and sold-out sleeper cars drastically limiting capacity.**

- **39 states** are served by long-distance trains
- **23 states** where long-distance trains are the only Amtrak service
- An estimated **\$587 million** in Calendar Year 2023 ticket revenue from long-distance trains—18% higher than 2019's pre-pandemic record revenues

Of Amtrak's 15 long-distance trains, most have just one daily round-trip and two have just three each week. Nonetheless, these routes are heavily used. They would carry even more passengers if Amtrak had more equipment, greater frequencies, and more routes. Lack of service, not lack of demand, limits usage.

Long-distance passenger train routes are ideal for connecting major urban areas with each other and with smaller cities and communities—many in rural areas—which are becoming more isolated as regional airline and intercity bus services disappear.

Long-distance trains generate high volumes and load factors by:

1. Providing a single-seat ride in many overlapping city pair markets;
2. Combining many small markets to generate economic volumes.

These routes function as connected and overlapping corridors. Many passengers transfer between or among other Amtrak short-distance and long-distance routes. The utility and effectiveness of individual routes grow significantly when they become part of an integrated system.

Rural Mobility in America

Connecting Millions with Appropriate Access to Public Transit

Amtrak's National Network, with its 15 long-distance routes connecting a series of state-supported services, has proved to be an essential transportation service to the 40 percent of the nation's small and rural communities that it serves, establishing a vital link between Small Town and Big City America. 62 million people live in this so-called "flyover country," a quarter of whom are veterans and another quarter are senior citizens over the age 65. With few alternatives, driving plays an outsized role, and it does so at a cost in health and in lives lost.

Increasing Safety for Rural Americans

19% - The percentage of Americans who live in rural communities.

33% - How many more miles rural residents drive than urban residents.

49% - The percentage that rural fatalities accounted for out of the total number of traffic fatalities nationwide.

Case Study: Amtrak's Empire Builder

- Runs 2,200 miles from Chicago to Seattle/Portland with 45 intermediary stops, but only 9% travel from endpoint to endpoint.
- Is a lifeline to Native Americans, veterans, and the elderly living in the rural Northern Tier that gives them access to larger cities such as Spokane, WA and St. Paul, MN.
- Today's Empire Builder service supports 321 jobs each year in Montana directly, indirectly, or through induced economic activity. The combined payroll of some \$21 million helps to generate nearly \$81 million in total economic output from the train in the state of Montana alone.
- When Montana mayors were asked what the effect of losing the Empire Builder would mean, all responded: "Devastating."
- *Rail Passengers* found that a second Amtrak train between Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul would bring \$25 million annually for the state of Minnesota, 8-10x the cost to operate the new service.
- *Rail Passengers* also found that the overall economic benefit for three states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois would be \$47 million annually—a return on investment of better than seven-to-one—much of which would flow to small towns along the route.

Rural Success Stories

How Public Transportation Can Transform Rural Communities

- **Meridian, MS**, with 39,000 residents on the Mississippi/Alabama line, invested \$7.5 million in a new Amtrak Intermodal Station. Over \$200 million has been invested within 3 blocks of the station in the last 20 years.
- **Normal, IL**, a town of 59,000, invested \$49.5 million as part of the first TIGER project in the U.S. Investment since 2004 in Normal and Bloomington has exceeded \$220 million.
- **Long Distance Routes:** Amtrak's existing group of daily long-distance trains (excluding the Auto Train) collectively produce some \$4.7 billion in economic benefits which are widely distributed throughout America's heartland.

	Kansas	North Carolina	North Dakota	Missouri
Direct Benefits	\$5,026,437	\$48,050,334	\$11,566,713	\$19,116,790
Indirect Benefits	\$7,388,863	\$70,633,992	\$17,003,068	\$28,101,682
Total LDR Benefits	\$12,415,300	\$118,684,326	\$28,569,781	\$47,218,472

[For a full breakdown of the economic benefits of long-distance routes, visit RailPassengers.org/Reports for detailed outputs across 32 states.]

For more information, please visit RailPassengers.org/Leg.Resources



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Passenger Trains: Economic Engines

Providing Resilience for American Families

The U.S. transportation status quo is broken—the average household spent \$12,295 on transportation in 2022, the second largest household expenditure category after housing (BTS). And the cost isn't just in dollars: an estimated 44,500 Americans died on U.S. roads in 2023 (NSC).

- Lower income households bear a high transportation cost burden, spending 30.2 percent of after-tax income on transportation in 2022 (BTS).
- Rural households spent an average of \$1,139 more per household on transportation than urban households in 2022 (BTS).

These trends have only gotten worse with rising fuel costs. In 2022, petroleum products accounted for about 90% of the total U.S. transportation sector energy use (Source: EIA). Any effective national policy for energy independence will require diversifying our transportation network and investing in energy-efficient, electrified passenger rail.

Economic Engines for Growth

A Connected America is not only good for passengers but good for America's cities and towns, where rail is a proven economic engine in the communities it serves. Every Amtrak long-distance route creates a return on taxpayers' equity for the communities that have invested in it over the past few decades. And thanks to rigorous economic-benefits modeling *Rail Passengers* has developed over the past three years, we have been able to quantify that return in a way that hadn't been done previously. ***Rail Passengers'* modeling suggests that Amtrak's interconnected services in the Northeast Corridor, the long-distance National Network and the dozens of State-supported Amtrak routes together return between \$7 billion and \$8 billion each year to our Nation's GDP – four times what we typically invest in the service. These long-distance routes below are just examples of the benefits long-distance trains can generate.**

Selected Economic Benefits Assessments (FY 2019)						
	City Of New Orleans	Empire Builder	Silver Services	Southwest Chief	Texas Eagle	Crescent
Cities Served	20	46	36	38	44	33
States Served	5	8	11	8	7	13
Ridership	235,670	433,372	743,461	338,180	321,694	295,180
Annual Federal Investment	\$17.9m	\$57.5m	\$76.2m	\$47.0m	\$25.4m	\$33.7m
Annual Economic Return	\$133.8m	\$595.2m	\$381.8m	\$484.8m	\$555.3m	\$232.8m
Return on Taxpayers' Equity	7.47X	10.35X	5.01X	10.31X	21.86X	6.91X

Source: Rail Passengers Association modeling estimate

*Indirect effects include community-level effects such as sales taxes, real-estate, local employment and other similar factors

Investing in American Manufacturing + Jobs

- An investment of \$1 billion in public transportation **supports and creates 49,700 jobs** (APTA)
- A 2024 report by the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Rail Division found **the state's rail system contributes over \$20 billion** into the state's economy and supports 88,000 jobs (NCDOT)
- **\$75.8 billion** in total contribution to U.S. GDP by the railway supply industry in 2020 (RSI)
- **682,426 jobs in the U.S.** supported by the rail supply industry in 2020 (RSI)

Rail Service = Rural Mobility, Equity and Opportunity

The National Network provides economic opportunities to less affluent and less well-educated communities, many of which fall below the national median income. Taxpayers support Amtrak's National Network in part because we want these towns to thrive and their citizens to have access to jobs and mobility. We all need the economy to grow and be strong.

- Just 2 of the 19 stations served by the **City of New Orleans** route enjoy a Median Household Income above the national average, while the entire route serves working class cities and towns with relatively modest incomes.
- The **Crescent** serves 17 communities off Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, 15 of which have incomes below the national median income.
- Some 13% of the communities on Amtrak's **Silver** services fall below the Federal poverty line.
- If the 2018 plan to break up the **Southwest Chief** with a bus-bridge had gone through, 32 universities would have lost train service, 47 hospitals would have lost train service, and 130,000 auto trips would've been added on to roads four times more dangerous than the national average—for a stretch of rural and small communities in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico with the lowest median income across the entire corridor.
- A study done by Transportation for America and the Southern Rail Commission found that **restoring passenger rail between Mobile and New Orleans would produce \$216 million** in annual economic benefits for Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.
- A Rail Passengers' economic analysis found that **a second Amtrak train between Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul would generate \$47 million** in annual benefits to Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois—a return on investment of better than seven-to-one.
- The impact is even greater for smaller communities. In 2018, the **Empire Builder** carried 2,400 passengers to Cut Bank, Montana (pop. 3,002), bringing \$378,725 in value to the community.

Virginia: A Case Study for A Decade of Growth + Prosperity

By investing in a significant boost to Amtrak service, Virginia has more than doubled its intercity rail ridership since 2003, removing 600 million vehicle-travel miles from the Commonwealth's highways:

- \$1.4 billion in annual economic returns to Virginia versus \$64 million in Federal support.
- Created or sustained 1,400+ jobs each year.
- Ridership in 2023 was a record 1.32 million passengers, a 29.8% year over year increase.

For more information, please visit RailPassengers.org/Leg.Resources