



PASSENGERS Voice

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AFTER BRIEF SHUTDOWN, CONGRESS SETTLES FOR ANOTHER SHORT-TERM FIX

With a divided House and Senate unable to forge a long-term solution on immigration, childhood health spending, and disaster relief spending, Congress for the fourth time settled for a short-term budget fix, passing a three-week Continuing Resolution that will keep the government running through February 8.

This move avoids a government shutdown, which is good for Amtrak and state transportation operations. However, it also further erodes the window to enact increased Fiscal Year 2018 funding for trains that passenger advocates secured from House and Senate budget committees last year.

With no agreement on the top-line numbers for defense and non-defense spending, Congressional leadership is already eyeing a fifth CR. When members of Congress finish their high-level negotiations, they will still need to give staffers enough time to write the complex omnibus bill, which means the process may drag on into March. RPA will continue to press budget negotiators to do the basic legislative work to invest in safer, more efficient transportation systems.

PUSH FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, HIGHER GAS TAX

While the Trump Administration missed another self-imposed deadline to release a detailed infrastructure plan, the bipartisan push to ramp up infrastructure investment in 2018 continued.

In an effort to overcome legislative gridlock blocking action on infrastructure investment, Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) is pushing his Republican colleagues to return earmarks to help heal the broken budget process. Proponents of the return argue it would give legislators an incentive to actually pass a budget, instead of limping along with a series of short term CRs passed at the last minute to avoid a government shutdown. By making it clear which projects will be funded--rather than an abstract pool of grant money--proponents argue earmarks can return stability to a budget process that both parties recognize is broken.

"When we appropriate the money but didn't know what it was going for, I had no skin in the game. I was just appropriating money," said Sessions, who Chairs the House Rules Committee.

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RPA HIRES NEW NORTHEAST FIELD ORGANIZER

Massachusetts transportation advocate Joseph Aiello will be joining the Rail Passengers Association staff as Field Coordinator for RPA's Northeast Division. This is the second divisional staff hire for the RPA as part of a move to create a stronger regional presence and increase the reach of our advocacy efforts at the local and state level.



Joseph Aiello was named RPA's new Field Coordinator for the Northeast Division

In his role as Field Coordinator, Aiello will be building upon the advocacy work he engaged in as an RPA Council Member for Massachusetts, where he was

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“ We are confident that, as the White House advances an infrastructure proposal this year, federal funding for the most important transportation project in the United States will be addressed. ”

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie on funding the Gateway Program



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Other members of Congress added that earmarks are actually more transparent than the new process, which relies on grants issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation, using metrics that states argue are often unclear, even to applicants. "I don't want to rely on the [Transportation Department] to say, 'Yeah, we agree with you, and we ought to do this,'" added Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR). "I'm the subject matter expert in my district. Give me the opportunity to determine where some of this money should go."

Republican leaders will have a hard time convincing their caucus. But there seems to be bipartisan consensus for returning to earmarks—at least for infrastructure spending. "It's not just a loss for one party or the other, no matter who the president is. It's a loss

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an active volunteer and was responsible for helping plan the last two RPA Northeast Regional annual meetings. He will be looking to take what he has accomplished in Massachusetts and build it out to the rest of the Northeast and New England. In addition to working with existing state rail passenger organizations, Aiello will forge new partnerships and relationships throughout the region. He will be traveling state to state to talk to and listen to the concerns of not only the local advocacy groups, but the RPA membership throughout the Northeast. Any RPA members in New England and the Northeast can reach Aiello with questions, suggestions, or comments at jaiello@narprail.org.

Aiello, originally from Chicago's south side, moved to Cambridge with his wife in 2009 and graduated

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A DAY ON BRIGHTLINE

By Susan Hadrous, RPA's Southeast Division Leader

Interstate-95 was a mess. As usual. But let me go back in time. Five minutes actually.

I had the privilege of riding the Brightline rails during the Friends and Family period that Brightline offered just prior to its opening to the public.

Walking into the West Palm Beach station lobby, you immediately notice the spacious seating areas, along with some of the most friendly and helpful staff that I've had the pleasure to meet. My Select ticket already showed a seat assignment but, with the

assistance of the staff, I was instructed how to correct this using the kiosk.

Brightline also offers an app for your phone that lets you purchase tickets, change seats, along with a number of other functions — a very handy tool for those who wish to bypass the ticket counter lines.

Open, roomy glass windows envelop the station to give it a bright open feeling. After taking the escalators upstairs, and taking a quick pass through security, it's off to your specific lounge. Choosing



Brightline made its first passenger service run on January 13.

either Select or Smart service, each lounge area is roomy with open seating with plug-ins for your computer, phone or other devices.

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FRA RELEASES TEXAS CENTRAL'S ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

By Peter LeCody
RPA Chairman

In its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) identified the preferred route for Texas Central Railway's high-speed rail (HSR) project between Dallas and Houston. The DEIS also commences the consultation process that will allow the HSR line to link the state's two largest urban and economic centers in less than 90 minutes, with a midway stop in the Brazos Valley.

"This is excellent news," said Peter LeCody, Chairman of the Rail Passengers Association and President of Texas Rail Advocates. "The Dallas – Houston bullet train has reached a development milestone never achieved for a high-speed train in Texas. We know that families and businesses in our



An example of a high-speed train.
(Photo Credit: Texas Central)

state want fast, affordable, reliable transportation options, and this rail service will provide that."

The FRA identified the preferred HSR alignment following a comprehensive analysis of major corridors proposed for the project. The analysis was completed after nearly four years of work by hundreds of experts that examined the environmental and social impacts of various routes. It now provides a path for the high-speed train's planning, design and pre-construction

phases, and it ensures the safety and environmental well-being of counties and communities along the dedicated right-of-way, 240-mile route. In addition, the DEIS reviews the potential impacts of stations, power or fueling stations, and maintenance facilities to support HSR operations.

Texas Central CEO Carlos Aguilar said the design/build teams, Irving, Texas-based Fluor Enterprises Inc. and The Lane Construction Corp., with WSP USA conducting engineering work, will use the DEIS findings to incorporate more details into planning, cost and scheduling. Their work will address remaining environmental issues in the best way possible and avoid conflicts with existing infrastructure, such as roads, transmission lines

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The Select area lounge provides a lovely arrangement of beverages and snacks with no charge for those passengers.

So now the mess: the traffic on the interstate. Departing Ft. Lauderdale I realized that this is a long, long overdue service. Based on the transfer service at the stations, there should be a substantial decrease on the roads. Why would anyone would bother driving when they can enjoy a smooth, stress-free ride?

RPA President Jim Mathews rode the train on a VIP run the Friday night before revenue service began

on Saturday morning, and he found the on-board experience more than lives up to the hype. A dedicated attendant in the Select car supplies free snacks and beverages and also offers wine and spirits. The remaining coaches are also served by an attendant, offering cart-based food service as you might see on an airline flight.

"Seats are leather throughout, recline nicely without smacking your neighbor, and quite spacious," Mathews says. "I wasn't able to measure pitch, but my guess is about 39-40 inches. First class seats are 21 inches wide, coach

is 19 inches wide. Restrooms are fully ADA-compliant, as is the entire train, with aisles and vestibules wide enough to handle a wheelchair with no problem."

My one concern is the walkway from the parking garage to the lobby -- it's uncovered. As Floridians we know when it rains, it really rains, and no coverage would be problematic, not just for the elderly, but those with medical issues and parents with small children.

Beyond that, it's an impressive service, and its future looks (dare I say) bright!

ON THE MOVE

Local, state and federal transit agencies saw several new hires and appointments in October. A few of them include:

• **Steven Santoro** - After 15 months as Executive Director at New Jersey Transit, Santoro will resign from the agency in April. Santoro first joined the agency in 2000 as director of the Hudson Bergen light-rail project.

• **James Foote** - Following the

passing of Hunter Harrison, CSX's board appointed Foote as the new president and CEO of the company. In the new role, Foote brings more than 40 years of rail industry experience.

• **Ken Hylander** - Amtrak hired Hylander, who has more than three decades of experience in aviation, as the railroad's new executive vice president and chief safety officer. Hylander previously served as the chief safety officer at Delta Airlines.



(Photo Credit: Progressive Railroading)

Steven Santoro will resign from NJ Transit in April.

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from Northeastern University with a Master's in Public Administration in 2013. While attending Northeastern, he was able to learn from former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Under the Governor's mentorship, Aiello became a vocal advocate for the North-South Rail Link, joining the Dukakis' led project working group as an outreach coordinator. While with the working group, he helped create a series of very successful "town hall" events around the Commonwealth to help educate the public and gather political support.

These events have been instrumental over the past year in helping advance the public conversation about the project and attract a bigger media spotlight.

In the past, Aiello has also worked on development issues in Cambridge's North Point neighborhood. One of these was the planning of the new Lechmere MBTA station, which was being moved as part of the Green Line Extension project. He also joined State Senator Eric Lesser in testifying on behalf of the proposed East-West higher speed line between Boston and Springfield.

DESTINATION OF THE MONTH PORTLAND, OR

Over the years, Portland, OR has developed a unique, and even weird, reputation for its culture - one that expresses itself through the outdoors, environmentally-friendly lifestyle, and passion for great eats and drinks. If you plan on checking out the City of Roses, here are five fun facts:

1 - Portland is one of two cities in the U.S. that has a dormant volcano within its city limits. (The other city? Jackson, MS.)

2 - If you enjoy a good microbrew, Portland is home to 58 breweries, and there are an additional 84 breweries in the Portland metro area.

3 - Portland's International Rose Test Garden contains 650 different types of roses over four acres of land. The garden is open to the public.



(Photo Credit: Travel Portland)

Portland, OR - the City of Roses

4 - The city is home to an expansive park system, but also holds the Guinness Book of Records for the smallest park, Mill Ends Park, which measures two-feet in diameter.

5 - Alberta Street, also known as Alberta Arts District, is 26 blocks of unique restaurants, boutique stores, galleria, coffee shops and more.

STATE NEWS

ALASKA GOVERNOR BILL WALKER issued an executive order to create a new advisory task force that will examine the feasibility of a passenger rail line between Anchorage and Wasilla. The task force will include nine members, and the study will determine estimates of capital and operating costs, ridership, economic and environmental benefits, and more. Initial findings are due to Walker no later than May 31, with a conclusion by October 1, 2019.



(Photo Credit: Amtrak)

The Amtrak Crescent.

FOR PEOPLE TRAVELING BETWEEN Atlanta and New Orleans, track work is being performed by Norfolk Southern Railway. It will affect Amtrak Crescent Trains 19 and 20 between Monday and

Thursday until February 8. As a result, Amtrak will provide bus service from Atlanta to Anniston, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Meridian, Laurel, Hattiesburg and New Orleans.

MEMBER BENEFITS

1 If you haven't done so already, claim your Travelers United Advocate Membership, and broaden support for consumer focus, at: <https://travelersunited.org/welcome-narp/>

2 Review the full and growing list of NARP benefits by logging on to: www.railpassengers.org/all-aboard/join/give

RAIL STATION OF THE MONTH: PORTLAND UNION STATION

Year round, Portland, OR is a terrific city to visit with great attractions for any type of interest - gardens, food, outdoors, beer and more. It's also easily accessible by train, as Portland Union Station sits in the Old Town Chinatown neighborhood of the city. Until you get to visit, here are five notable facts about Portland Union Station:

1 - Portland Union Station opened on Valentine's Day in 1896, making the station 122 years old this month.

2 - Portland Union Station is a major transit hub; it serves 13 daily Amtrak trains and allows travellers rail access to Hillsboro, Wilsonville, Clackamas and Portland Airport.

3 - In 1975, the station was added to the



(Photo Credit: Amtrak)

Portland Union Station

National Register of Historic Places.

4 - A recognizable focal point of the station is its 150-foot clock tower, which includes a four-sided Seth Thomas clock and neon signs.

5 - The neon signs, which read "Go by Train" and "Union Station" were put up in 1948 and are still used today.

2018 'AT-LARGE' AND BOARD NOMINATIONS OPEN

RPA/NARP is inviting members in good-standing to consider running for one of the up-to 10 available 'At-Large' positions on the Council of Representatives (the Association's volunteer governing body). These positions are for a two-year term commencing immediately upon election by the State Representatives at the Council of Representatives Annual Business Meeting being held on Wednesday, April 18, 2018 in Alexandria, VA.

Any RPA/NARP member who has paid dues for at least one year, is at least 18 years of age and is a U.S. resident is eligible to self-nominate and run to be elected at the April meeting. The Council consists of 112 elected state representatives, the up-to 10 elected 'At-Large' representatives and the up-to 15 elected Board Officers and Directors.

The Council of Representatives represents the RPA/NARP membership in setting and approving the overall policy and direction for the Association.

For more information on these 'At-Large' positions, including the duties, responsibilities

and required qualifications, and to submit a self-nomination, go to: <http://ow.ly/Yxzs30hxl4P>.

In addition, self-nominations are now being sought from qualified members interested in being elected by the Council of Representatives at the April Council Annual Business Meeting to an Association officer position (Chair of the Board; one of four Vice-Chairs; Treasurer or Secretary) or to one of three available Board Director positions. Board officer positions are for a two-year term and the Board director positions are for a three-year term, both commencing at the conclusion of April's Annual Business Meeting. For complete information on these Board Officer & Director positions, including the duties, responsibilities and required qualifications, and to submit a self-nomination, go to: <http://ow.ly/LGSj30hxlaf>.

For the required 'At-Large' Representative and Board Officer & Director Candidate Information Statement self-nomination form, go to: <http://ow.ly/VZvW30hxl7h>.

The deadline to submit Candidate Information Statements is March 31, 2018.

PASSENGER VOICE: OLD ORDER AMISH – STRONG CUSTOMERS FOR AMTRAK

We enjoy hearing from our members on why they enjoy taking the train to get where they need to go. To share your stories with us, please email them to narp@narp.org.

Allen Brougham, RPA Member, Maryland

This story is not written on behalf of myself, but out of respect for a significant group of dedicated travelers who are not likely to write anything on their own behalf.

On almost every long-distance train I ride, I see numerous members of the 'Old Order Amish' community. They routinely use Amtrak as their preferred method of travel to visit relatives or to visit medical facilities. They most often travel together, with their immediate family, and surely represent a significant source of income for Amtrak.

Among those Old Order Amish with whom I have spoken, they explain that air travel is routinely shunned by them, except for situations of dire emergencies (such as life-flights to nearby hospitals). The Old Order

Amish do not typically own automobiles, but they are free to use such ground-based public means as trains and buses. Trains, being more comfortable, seem to be their choice of modes when trains are available. In this context, Amtrak can be regarded for them as a means of 'necessity.'

The Amish do not have a lobbying group. They are not likely to join organizations having a political agenda. Still, they are worthy of respect in the eyes of those interested in the traveling welfare of all of our citizens, something that ought to be noted in any sort of presentation to elected officials supporting the necessity of Amtrak.

It is also worthy of note that the population base of Old Order Amish is increasing. The Amish encourage the development of large families. Indeed, here is a significant harbinger of passenger growth that is not likely to disappear.

I believe that RPA, and others who want to support passenger rail, should dwell upon the points made in this story.

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when you have this kind of uncertainty and chaos and instability [in the budget process],” said Rep. David Price (D-N.C.), a spending leader who was first elected in 1987. “Just because it’s gone on for so long doesn’t mean it’s any less of a disaster. We never, ever should think of this as a new normal.”

The plan may even have a supporter in the White House, with President Trump indicating he’d welcome earmarks--perhaps relishing an opportunity to flex his dealmaking muscles. “This is draining the swamp,” Rep. Sessions responded when asked if the move was counter to the Trump Administration’s call for reform in Washington. “If you think we’re going back to where we were we have missed the boat.”

PACIFIC NORTHWEST LEGISLATORS TOUT RAIL SAFETY TECH BILL

Led by Democrats on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, several members of the Washington State and Oregon delegations in Congress have put forth legislation that would aid in the delivery of life-saving Positive Train Control technology and prevent any extensions beyond the current end-of-year deadline. The bill comes just weeks after the deadly derailment in Washington State which authorities have determined would have been prevented by PTC.

On January 11, Rep. Peter DeFazio, the leading Democrat on House T&I, along with Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Michael Capuano (D-MA), introduced H.R. 4766, the “Positive Train Control Implementation and Financing Act.” The bill is designed to speed up the implementation of life-saving PTC technology that could prevent future catastrophic rail accidents.

The bill would provide \$2.6 billion to implement PTC--a dramatic improvement over the current situation, with local transit agencies struggling to meet the unfunded mandate. It would also prohibit the U.S. DOT from granting any extensions beyond the current deadline, December 2018. “No more delays, no more extensions, no more excuses from railroads who have had 10 years to implement PTC technology,” said DeFazio. “Since Congress first passed legislation to mandate PTC implementation in 2008, some railroads have been diligent in implementing PTC while others have clearly been dragging their feet.”

The bill will also require quarterly updates from Amtrak to Congress on PTC installation progress.

Upcoming Rail Passengers Association Events

Sunday, April 15 - Wednesday, April 18

- **Make plans to attend** RPA’s Spring 2018 Advocacy Summit & Day on The Hill & Annual Council Business Meeting Washington, DC
- Host Hotel - Hilton Old Town Alexandria (VA) - **Discounted Group Rate Rooms Are Now Available!**
- RPA’s Annual Day on The Hill & Congressional Reception - Tuesday, April 17
- Event Registration Is Now Available. Visit The **Event Page** For Complete Information

Upcoming Regional Rail Passengers Association and State Passengers Association Member Meetings & Events

- **Thursday, February 1** - Trains In The Valley Meeting - Greenfield, MA
- **Saturday, March 10** - ESPA/RPA Joint New York State Meeting & Lunch - Schenectady, NY
- **Saturday, March 24** - RPA New England Regional Meeting - Boston, MA

Please contact Bruce Becker (**bbecker@narprail.org**) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and on-line) of upcoming events!



RPA LAUNCHES \$10,000 SCHOLARSHIP

The Rail Passengers Association launched a new scholarship program for college students, with the chance to win \$10,000 for higher education. A goal of RPA is to ensure that people across America, young and old, have access to passenger rail and other transit services. In doing so, RPA also recognizes that many college students also rely on having reliable and quality public transit to commute to and from classes.

With this in mind, RPA wants to support college students in their education and is offering a \$10,000

scholarship to help pay for higher education during the 2018-2019 school year. Students can nominate themselves for the chance to win, or a student can be nominated by you. The only criteria is that the winning student must be enrolled in a U.S. accredited college or graduate program for the 2018-2019 school year.

For details on how to enter or nominate a student, as well as rules for the scholarship program, please www.crowdrise.com/rpascholarship.

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and subsurface utilities. "Thousands of hours have been spent to ensure the Texas Bullet Train will be constructed and operated in a way that gives Texans a choice for the safest mode of transportation in the world. This process ensures issues identified are addressed in the best way possible for communities and the environment. We will respectfully follow this public consultation process to ensure legitimate concerns from all stakeholders are addressed," Aguilar said.

The report also reflects input from thousands of comments by the public, including landowners, community groups, elected officials and others.

Following the DEIS release, the FRA opened a 60-day public comment period that will run into February 2018, which Texas Central and the FRA will review before making a final statement.



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