On-Time Performance

What's the Problem?

Poor service from many host railroads has caused chronic and excessive delays for millions of riders who rely on the Amtrak system. Freight trains caused 1 million minutes of delay to Amtrak passengers in 2019 – that's equivalent to 2 years of passengers waiting for freight to go first. Interference by freight trains is the most common source of delay for Amtrak passengers and the largest cause of poor on-time performance of Amtrak trains.

- Since Amtrak's inception in 1971, the law has required that freight or "host" railroads are to provide Amtrak passenger trains passage on their railroad and give them priority access or "preference" over their freight trains.
- Despite the law, host railroads often ignore their obligation to provide Amtrak passengers with preference over freight trains and put freight trains in front of Amtrak trains causing delay to Amtrak passengers.
- Today, a majority of the nearly 20 million passengers traveling on Amtrak National Network do so over freight or "host" railroads.
- 70% of the delays to Amtrak passengers on host railroads are caused by host railroads, yet Amtrak passenger trains utilize only 16% of the total host railroad network.

How Does This Impact Communities and Passengers in My District and Across the Amtrak National Network?

- Amtrak's on-time performance on most host railroads is poor and continues to decline today.
  - In fiscal year 2019, on average, long distance passengers were 42% on time.
    - Delays caused by freight trains totaled nearly 1 million minutes of delay to Amtrak trains — that's over two years of lost time!
- Amtrak's Inspector General has estimated that improving OTP by just 5% on all routes would result in $12.1M in financial benefits in the first year.
  - If OTP on long-distance routes could improve to 75% network-wide, the estimate rises to $41.9M per year in cost savings plus one-time savings of $336M by reducing equipment replacement needs.
- State corridor trains are impacted too, such as between Seattle, WA and Eugene, OR, where one-third of all passengers arrived late in 2020 due to host railroad delays
- Some passengers suffer worse than others — Amtrak's on time performance on the Crescent was 29% in FY 2019.

What Has Been Done to Try to Address the Issue?

- In 2008, in response to a dramatic deterioration in on time performance, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) put in place a process that would allow the Surface Transportation Board to investigate and address poor host performance.
    - PRIIA was effective in improving performance on host railroads, temporarily.
    - After PRIIA's passage, Amtrak's long distance on time performance went from 30% in 2006 to over 75% in 2009.
    - After PRIIA's passage, Amtrak's on time performance overall was above 80%, however, after legal challenges to PRIIA in 2014 it had plummeted below 70%.
- By 2014, the STB's ability to investigate and address poor on-time performance and host delays was effectively eliminated by a series of legal challenges from the host railroads.

What Now? How Can We Improve On-Time Performance?

#1 Hold the Host Railroads accountable for making your constituents late and to fix this

Amtrak Host Railroad Report Card 2019
Who delays passengers?

The Host Railroad Report Card grades each of the six Class I freight host railroads based on delays caused to Amtrak trains in 2019.

1	Canadian Pacific	A
2	CSX	B+
3	BNSF	B
4	Union Pacific	B-
5	Canadian National	D
6	Norfolk Southern	F

Average grade for all host railroads: C

#2 Sign-on to the Senator Dick Durbin's Rail Passenger Fairness Act to ensure that passengers aren't illegally stranded by the freight railroads.

- Currently, only the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) can enforce preference in civil action.
- To date, the DOJ has initiated one enforcement action and that was in 1979.
- While that authority should remain with the DOJ, *Rail Passengers* urges that Congress act to extend the authority to enforce preference to Amtrak, just as any other company would have a right to go to court if its rights were being violated.

For More Information, Please Visit railpassengers.org/blueprint