



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

Passenger Rail In 2025: Rail Passengers Association

Jim Mathews | President & CEO

Washington, DC

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 we partner with businesses large and small.

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: Passenger-Focused Public Policy Advice



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Rail Passengers was among a handful of policy organizations asked to play a pivotal role crafting the 2021 Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act, or IIJA, creating new capital grants programs, emphasizing Amtrak service over profits, coaxing more States off the sidelines to compete for Federal rail funding, and appropriating an historic \$66 billion for passenger rail.

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.



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State of Play in DC Today

A snapshot of the competing ideas, ideologies, and priorities affecting passenger rail at the Federal level...and beyond.

THE STATE OF PLAY

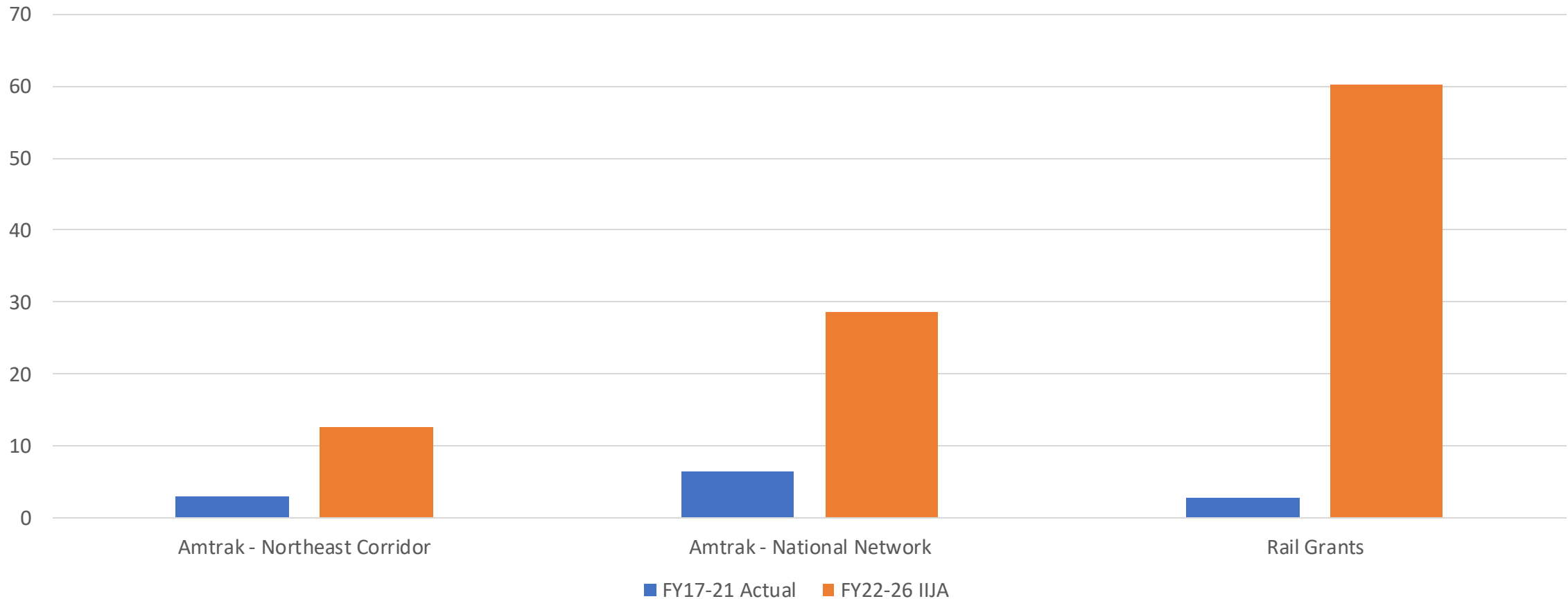
A Reminder Of Where We Are:

The Current Five Years Versus The Prior Five Years



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Rail Funding (Billions)



A Four-Front Funding Fight:

Different 'Buckets,' Different Threats And Strategies



1. Enacted Funds

- FY 2025 continuing resolution averted shutdown
- Trump, Musk still seeking cuts

2. FY26 Process

- President's budget could be delayed until May
- Appropriations markups would follow

3. Recissions

- Congressionally-authorized clawbacks for deficit reduction
- Could be part of reconciliation or handled separately

4. Reconciliation

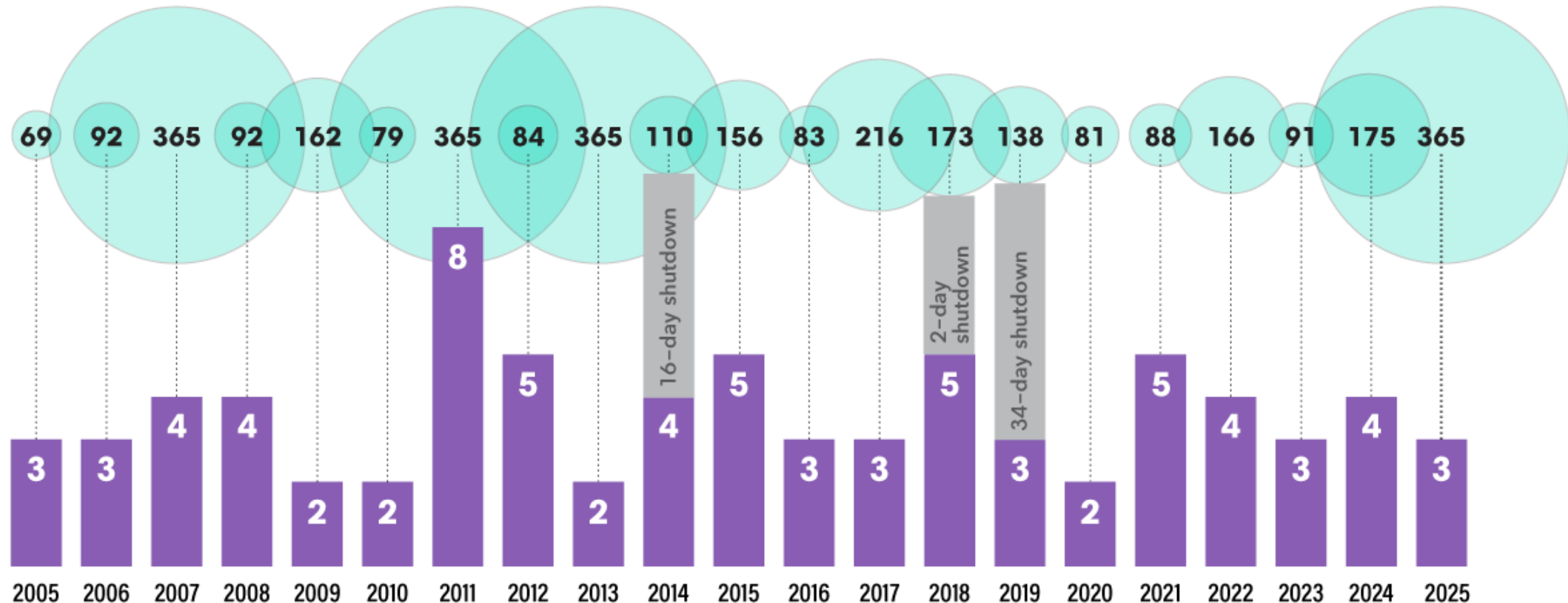
- Congress weighs providing energy, defense, border in reconciliation
- Still split on one- or two-bill strategy

Congress Passes FY25 Continuing Resolution: The Last Full-Year Stopgap Bill Was FY '13



Congress Remains Reliant on Stopgap Funding

■ Number of CRs ● Total duration of CRs ■ Funding gap





Congress Passes FY25 Continuing Resolution: But The FY25 Funding Fight Could Still Drag On

Impoundment

- Trump administration seeks to withhold funding that was appropriated by Congress
- Critics say such a move is unconstitutional; Democrats vow to challenge in court

DOGE Cuts

- Democrats wanted language in CR to rein in Elon Musk-led efforts to slash funding
- Trump administration could seek vote to codify DOGE cuts through rescissions package that Congress could consider through expedited process

What's At Stake:

As Much As \$10 Billion In “Guaranteed” FY 26 Funds



Impoundment

- Trump administration seeks to withhold funding that was appropriated by Congress
- Critics say such a move is unconstitutional; Democrats vow to challenge in court

DOGE Cuts

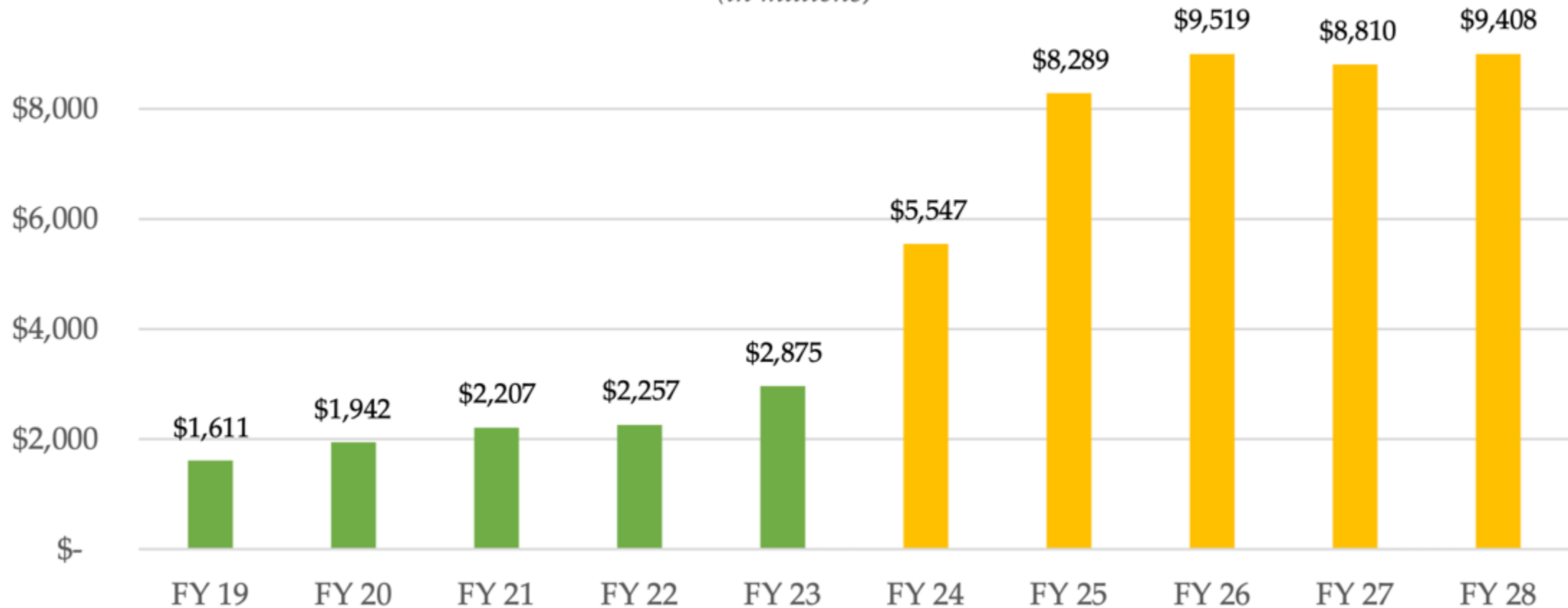
- Democrats wanted language in CR to rein in Elon Musk-led efforts to slash funding
- Trump administration could seek vote to codify DOGE cuts through rescissions package that Congress could consider through expedited process

What's At Stake:

Strangling Amtrak Capital Investment After Decades' Delays



Fig. 1.6: Annual Capital Expenditures, Actual & Planned
(in millions)



THE STATE OF PLAY

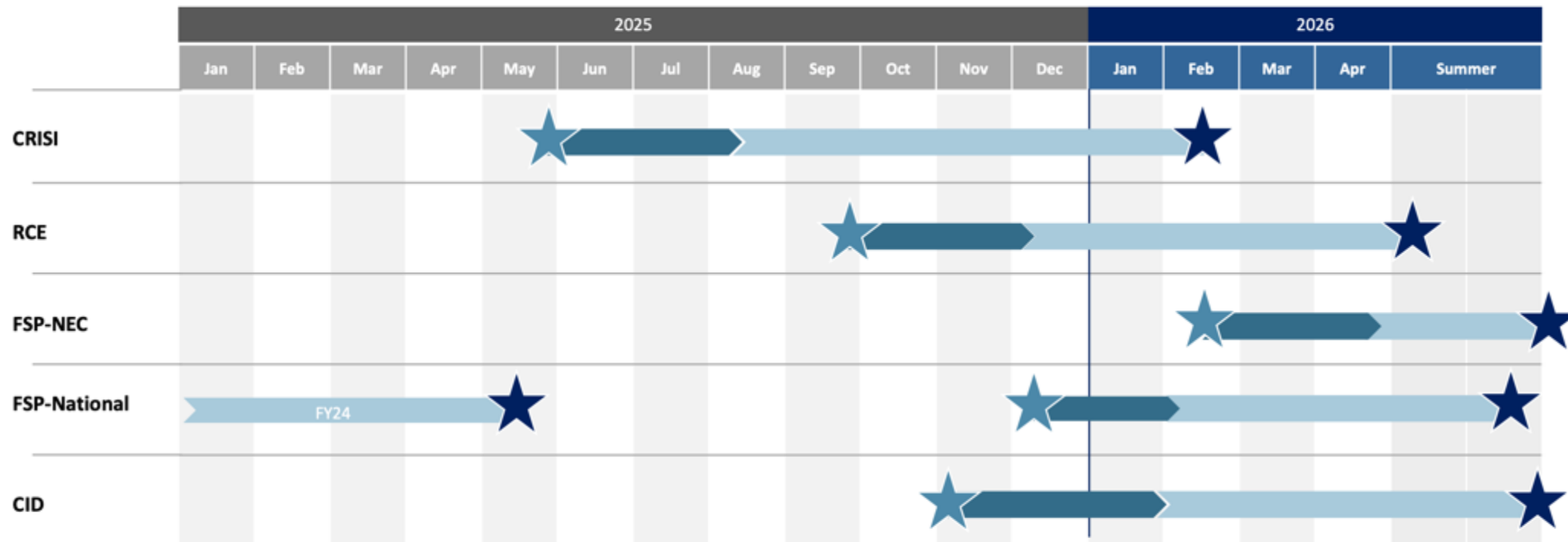
What's At Stake:

Discretionary Rail Grants...Also Uncertain



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Preliminary FRA Discretionary Grant Calendar



★ NOFO Publication ➡ Application Period ➡ Evaluation & Selection Period ★ Award Announcement

NOFO CYCLE STAGES ARE ESTIMATED FOR PLANNING PURPOSES, AND NOT EXACT DURATIONS OR DATES. CHANGES MAY OCCUR, AND FRA WILL UPDATE ACCORDINGLY.

What Comes Next:

Fiscal 2026 Budget Process Is Off To A Late Start



Budget Request

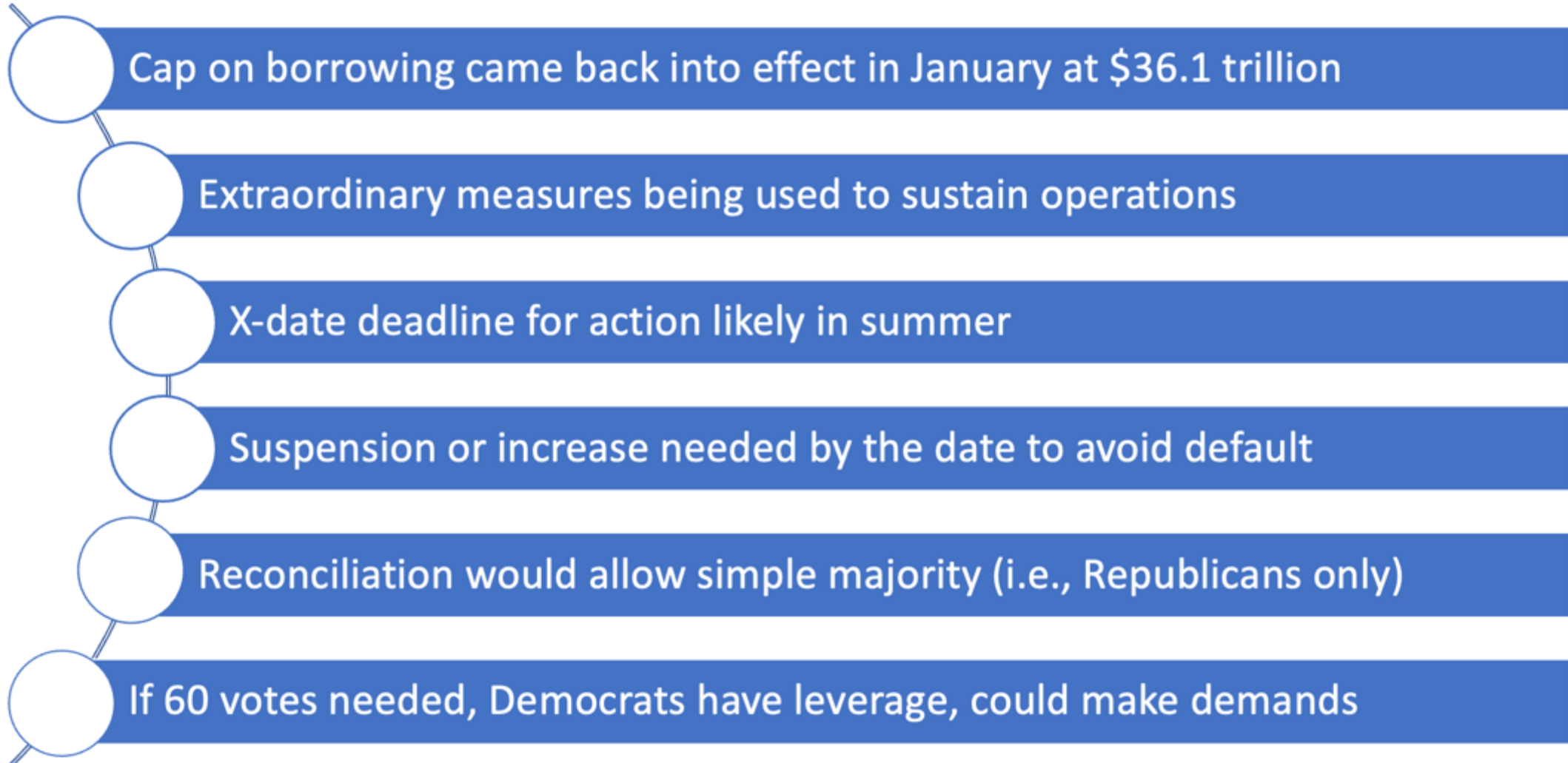
- President's "skinny" budget proposal likely to come in April or May
- Budget is due the first Monday in February but there's no penalty for missing the deadline
- Request is often delayed several months when there's a new administration
- President's budget doesn't provide or spend money; it requests funds from Congress, kicking off the appropriations process for the year

Spending Bills

- Delayed budget will push back appropriators' plans to write fiscal 2026 spending bills
- House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole (R-Okla.) said in February he wants to start markups in late April; likely to tackle smaller bills first
- No spending caps in place for fiscal 2026; limits under 2023 debt-limit deal applied only through fiscal 2025
- Republicans seeking to codify DOGE cuts in fiscal 2026 appropriations process

What Comes Next:

Debt Limit Debate Looms As Well





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Mapping A Prosperous Future

IJA gave us the blueprint to unleashing unprecedented growth and prosperity across America's Heartland.



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THE WAY FORWARD

The Economic-Benefits Case:

Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'




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An advertisement for Amtrak featuring two waiters, a woman and a man, in white uniforms and dark ties, standing in front of a restaurant entrance. A sign above the entrance reads '1870'. The background is a dark, textured wall.

CONTRIBUTING \$7.4 BILLION
TO THE U.S. ECONOMY, PLUS TIPS.

Lori Mock and Nykolas Alford serve up smiles
for Amtrak® customers at Weidmann's Restaurant
in Meridian, Mississippi.

 **AMTRAK®**
amtrak.com

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

THE WAY FORWARD

The Economic-Benefits Case:

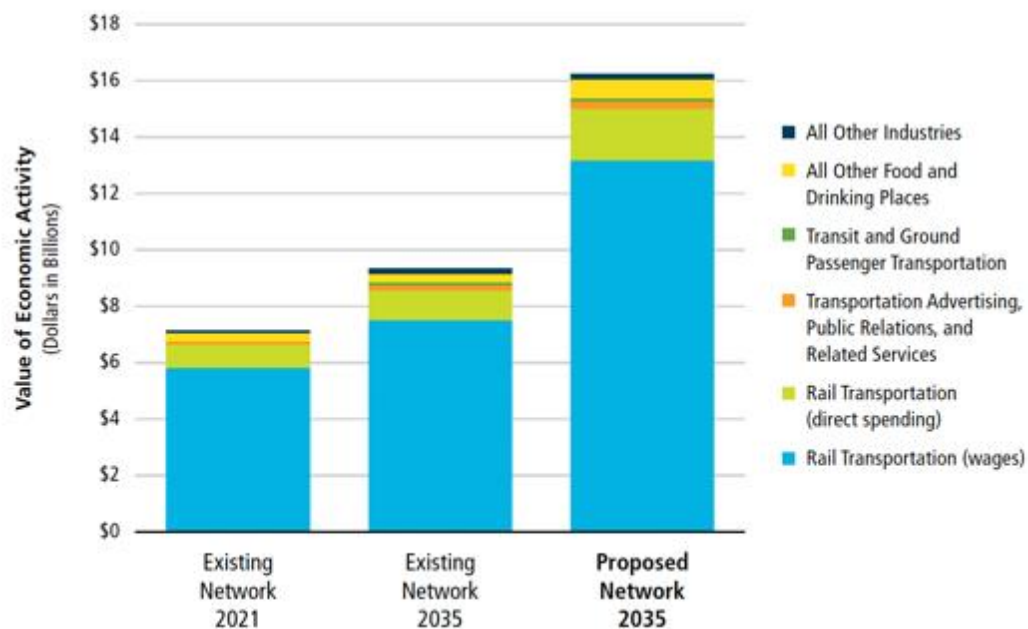
Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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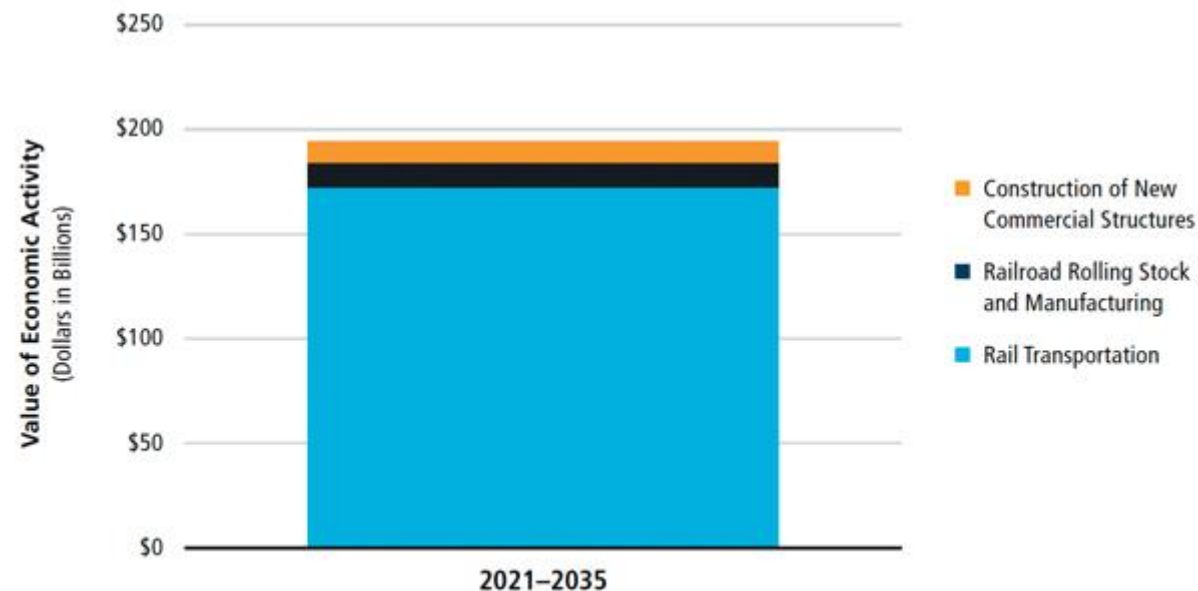
The value of economic activity in other sectors generated by the operation of the corridor vision is substantial, assuming a ramp-up over fifteen years.

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

The Economic-Benefits Case:

Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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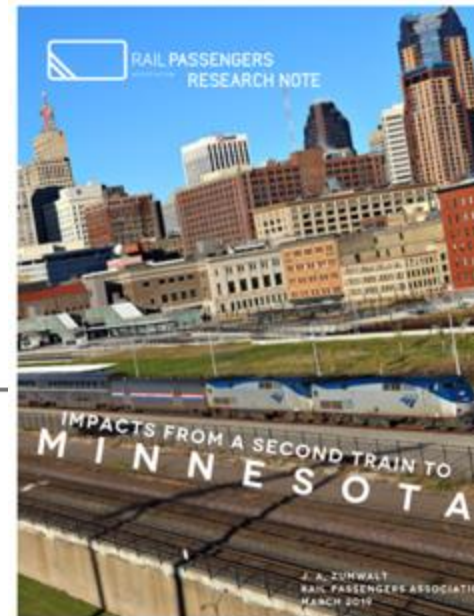
- RPA developed an in-house economic-benefits model in collaboration with the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott National Center
- Assess DIRECT and INDIRECT benefits (visitor spending, tax receipts, job creation, etc.)

Bustituted:
The Socioeconomic Impacts of Replacing
Southwest Chief Service Over Raton Pass

Presented by:

Dr. Yanyuan Zheng, Research Professor, University of Southern Mississippi
Celah Pinar, Graduate Research Assistant, University of Southern Mississippi
Amit Tripathi, Undergraduate Student Researcher, University of Southern Mississippi
James Abram Zumwalt, Director of Policy Research, Rail Passengers Association

Dec. 2018



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The Economic-Benefits Case:

Passenger Rail Is The Heartland's 'Prosperity Engine'



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SELECTED ANNUAL BENEFITS	City Of New Orleans	Empire Builder	Silver Services	Southwest Chief	Texas Eagle	Crescent
Direct Economic Benefits*	\$54.18	\$240.96	\$154.57	\$196.29	\$224.79	\$94.26
Indirect Economic Benefits**	\$79.65	\$354.21	\$227.22	\$288.54	\$330.45	\$138.56
TOTAL ANNUAL BENEFITS TO SERVED STATES (\$ millions)	\$133.84	\$595.18	\$381.79	\$484.83	\$555.25	\$232.80
ANNUAL OPERATIONAL INVESTMENT (\$ millions)	\$40.43	\$109.50	\$149.59	\$102.68	\$57.52	\$72.56
ANNUAL BENEFITS RATIO	3.31	5.44	2.55	4.72	9.65	3.21

Source: Rail Passengers Association modeling estimate

* Direct Economic Benefits include visitor spending, avoided vehicle-miles traveled, etc.)

** Indirect Economic Benefits include local sales tax receipts, community-level payrolls, etc.)



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“OK, Jim, but what does this look like
in real life?”

CATALYST FOR EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

Denver Union Station Redevelopment:

‘Prosperous, Walkable, Diverse, Distinctive, Green’



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- ✓ Ten chef-owned restaurants and bars
- ✓ Five specialty shops
- ✓ Public recreation areas
- ✓ Boutique hotel (The Crawford)
- ✓ Amtrak, RTD Light Rail, commuter buses
- ✓ Airport rail service



CATALYST FOR EXPLOSIVE GROWTH
Denver Union Station Redevelopment:

‘Prosperous, Walkable, Diverse, Distinctive, Green’



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Downtown Denver 2008



Downtown Denver 2021

CATALYST FOR EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

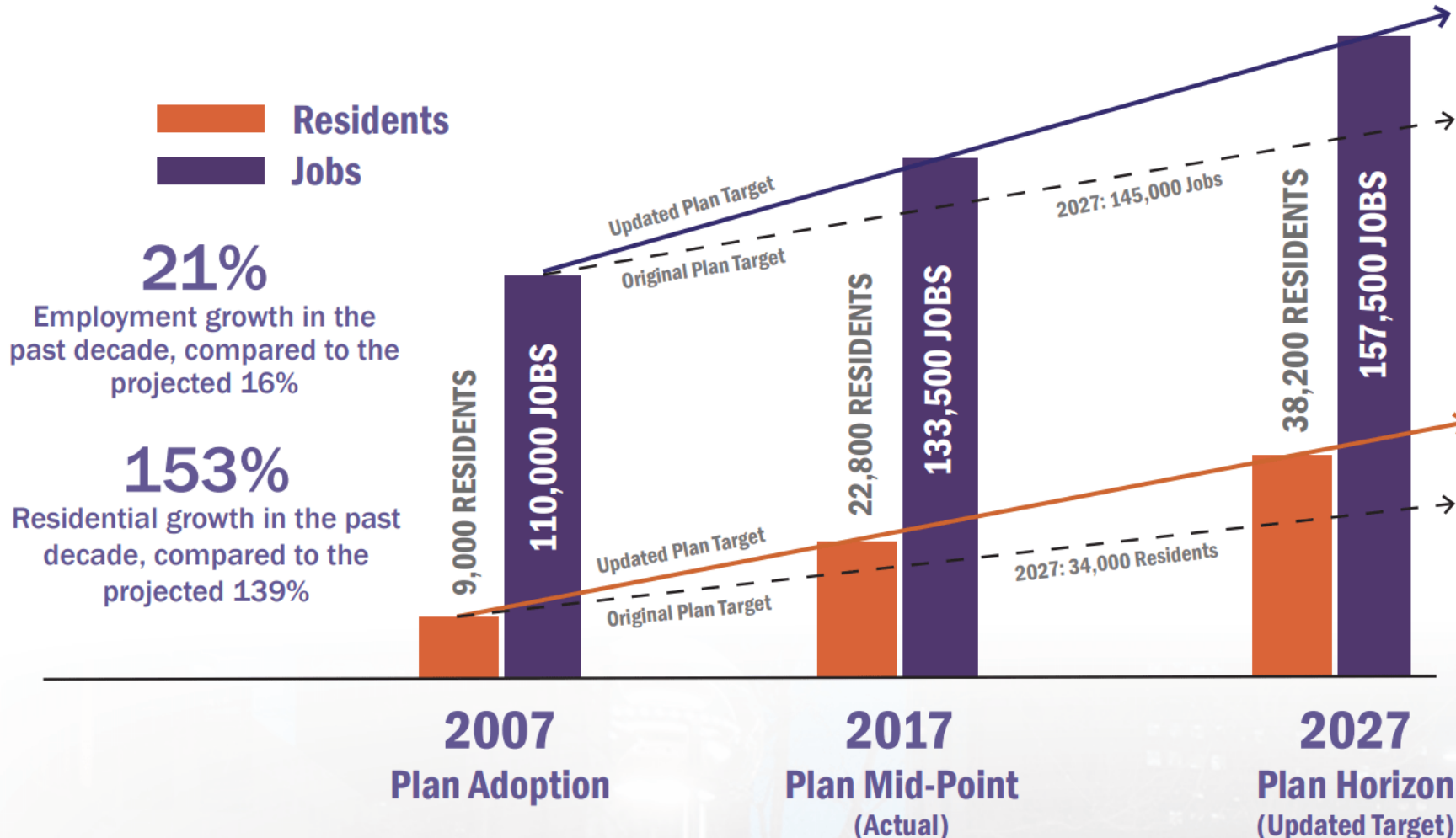
Denver Union Station Redevelopment:

‘Prosperous, Walkable, Diverse, Distinctive, Green’



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Growth Projections for Downtown Denver through 2027



CONNECTING THE MID-ATLANTIC A Decade Of Growth:

Virginia Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation + Amtrak



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- ✓ **\$1.5 billion in economic returns to Virginia**
- ✓ **Creates or sustains 1,400+ jobs each year**
- ✓ **\$390 million in new tourist spending**
- ✓ **Profitable “above the rail” – estimated \$17.58 per passenger**

- Two new trains + three Northeast Corridor extensions
 - Total Amtrak service increase of 31%
- 6.8 million Virginians served
 - 8.6% of the U.S. armed forces
 - 85% of Virginia’s higher-education students
- **2024 ridership record: 1,389,840**
 - Pre-pandemic record: 953,008 in 2019
- Four of Amtrak’s five best financial performing regional corridors
- 600 million vehicle-travel miles removed from Virginia highways

Sources: Virginians for High Speed Rail, Rail Passengers Association

GROWTH ENGINE IN NEW ENGLAND

Downeaster Means Business:

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority + Amtrak



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- ✓ **Directly employs 100 people / \$6.2 million**
- ✓ **Buys \$5 million in goods from 155 vendors**
- ✓ **Brings 100,000 annual visitors to Maine...**
- ✓ **...who together create \$29 million in tourism revenue**

- **Five daily roundtrips between Portland and Boston**
 - **Two add'l extended to Freeport and Brunswick**
- **More than half a million riders each year**
 - **More than doubled since 2005**
- **Catalyst to attract private capital**
 - **\$105 million invested in Thompson's Point complex adjacent to Portland station**

Sources: Rail Passengers Association, NNEPRA

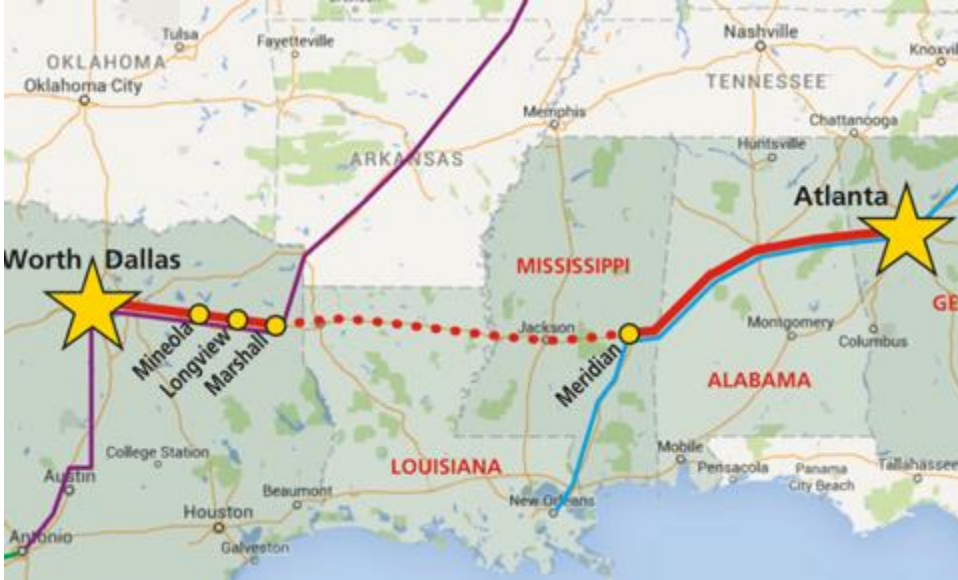
CONNECTING MEGAREGIONS

I-20 Corridor Rail Proposal:

Universities, Military Bases, Tourism Attractions



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- ✓ **Mississippi annual economic benefit: \$73.4 million**
- ✓ **Louisiana annual economic benefit: \$70 million**
- ✓ **Texas annual economic benefit: \$63.5 million**
- ✓ **661 new jobs created across Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas**

- Amtrak agreed to lead an application to the FRA Fed/State Partnership program covering the I-20 Corridor.
- Closes a glaring gap and links population centers totaling 110 million people.
- Service to Jackson's airport
- *Rail Passengers'* economic benefits model projects total annual benefits to the three states served of **\$207 million**.
- 630 unique origin-destination trip combinations possible on a single route

Sources: Rail Passengers Association



CONNECTING PEOPLE

Making Lives Better, Richer, Fuller:

Ending Isolation For Those With Few Or No Other Options



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- ✓ Medically travel-limited
- ✓ Live in areas with few or no air or bus options
- ✓ Traveling with extra luggage or moving bins
- ✓ Need affordable options
- ✓ Weather-limited...and many more!

- Gary, a **Mayo Clinic patient**, told us he travels for life-altering treatments and relies on being able to take the train to Winona...
- Lucille, a **grandmother** from Marks, Miss., waited two decades for service to begin in 2018 so she could visit her grandchildren in Memphis...
- Tens of thousands of **students** attend some 20 colleges or universities in Virginia and rely today on Amtrak for a safe and affordable way home for breaks and moving in and out of dorms...
- We shared **1,400+ stories from real passengers** with the Surface Transportation Board to help regulators understand the real-world benefits of passenger-rail travel...and the real-world consequences if it were to end or be reduced.

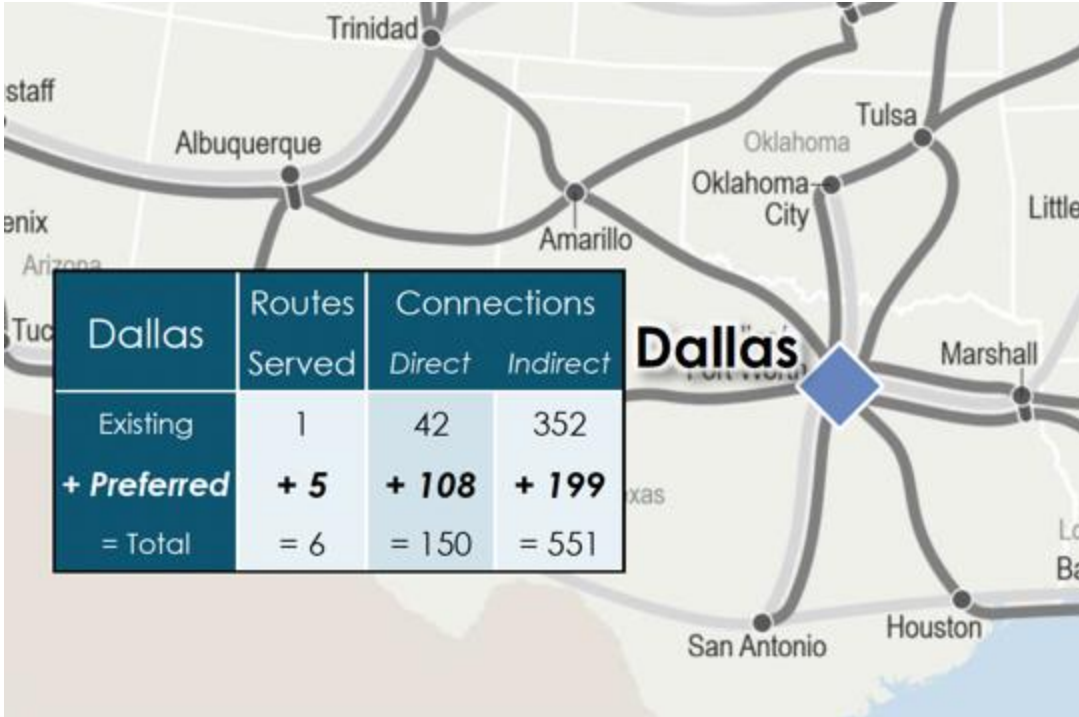
THE WAY FORWARD

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 with **15 new routes**
 - **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



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Our Priorities Today: A Lot More Than Maps And Dots

IJA gave us the blueprint, and now we have to see it through. The upcoming Surface Transportation reauthorization is a great opportunity to streamline and supercharge our industry. And it's always a good time to remind Congress that passenger rail enjoys broad, bipartisan voter support.

Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act:

A Great Start...Now Let's Stick The Landing



- **Educating Congress** on the **work already being done through IIJA funds**—specific corridors and stations, network-wide improvements, and equipment procurement
- Helping DOTs, Chambers, universities, and individual rail advocates support their state- and regional-level projects advancing through the Corridor Identification Program pipeline
- Working with communities across the U.S. to fulfill the promise of the FRA's Long-Distance Service Study
 - LDSS Implementation Working Group via reauthorization



Surface Transportation Reauthorization:

Planning The Next Steps After IIJA/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

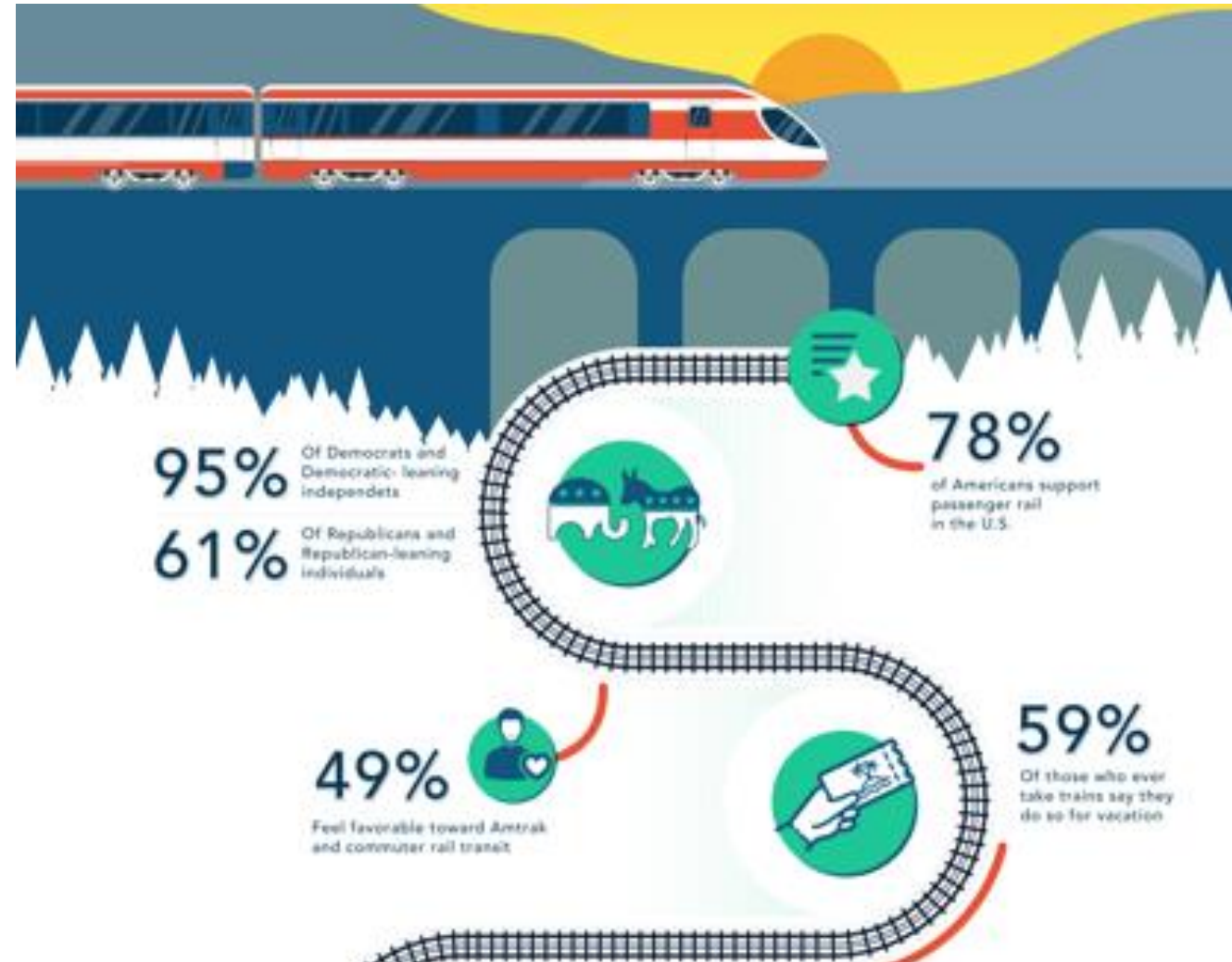
- **Dedicated funding** for passenger rail programs to ensure that agencies have greater predictability
 - Introduce some formula funding to help reduce “spikiness” in Federal support
- **Speed project delivery through prescribed limits on planning and environmental review**
 - Reform the “Study-Review-Study More” cycle
 - NEPA reforms
 - **Expand and leverage categorical exclusions, or CEs**
- Address equipment shortage, procurement lead-times
 - Among ideas we’re exploring: a national equipment leasing pool
 - **Encourage long-term development of a robust industrial base** to supply current and future railcar needs



Reminding Congress Of Rail's Broad Support: Bipartisan Agreement On More And Better Trains

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
- **57%** support high-speed rail
- **60%** would spend \$100 billion or more improving U.S. passenger rail





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LET'S TALK MORE!

- Reach out to
jmathews@narprail.org or
jstone@narprail.org
- www.railpassengers.org

Scan QR Code
to Donate Online:



IF YOU'D LIKE TO SUPPORT OUR
WORK OR HELP US ADVOCATE FOR
MORE TRAINS:

SUBSCRIBE, CONTRIBUTE, AND JOIN
RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION
TODAY!

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