



RAIL TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT - AUGUST 2023



Amtrak Coast Starlight (Los Angeles - Seattle)

Effective rail transportation is essential to avert the worst effects of human-caused climate change. Increasing rail and transit, and moving away from our current heavy emphasis on road and air travel, will bring many environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Rail transportation is inherently much more energy efficient than road transport, especially for freight. Reducing one of the basic factors of production – transportation – reduces the costs of virtually every sector of the economy, thereby increasing sustainability. Electrifying railroad operations will further increase these benefits. Therefore, improving passenger and freight rail transportation needs to be a national priority for the US. The purpose of [this statement](#) is to inform the public about how rail is a sustainable transportation solution and to provide a guide to action to improve the nation's railroads.

SUMMARY

Effective rail transportation is in the best interest of the nation and the planet. The US railroad network is under-utilized, and we should expect more benefits from it. Current rail policies that shortchange the public interest deny Americans the compelling benefits inherent in moving as much freight and passengers by rail as possible.

Trains are too-often an unsung, but essential, solution to the climate emergency. The inherent energy efficiency of rail transportation means that it is the most climate-friendly form of powered transportation over land. Rail generates only about one-fifth to one-third of the emissions of equivalent road transportation. Nationwide, road transportation is responsible for 82 percent of transportation greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; while rail is responsible for 2 percent. Electrifying railroads will further reduce their GHG emissions and more than triple their energy efficiency.

The climate crisis solution lies in using rail transportation far more than we do and utilizing it in innovative ways. Rapid change in transportation priorities to favor rail transportation can be a fast and effective climate emergency response.

Implementing improved rail services is an important part of the solution to both transportation equity and climate challenges. Well planned, robust passenger and freight rail operations provide benefits such as good jobs, equitable mobility, health and safety, reduced GHG emissions, reduced traffic congestion, and reduced damage to highway infrastructure.

All levels of government need to recognize the importance of robust rail transportation for both passenger and freight. In the near term, cities, counties, states and tribes can leverage grant opportunities such as those offered by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Because most federal grant opportunities require matching funds, it is important for these levels of government to have well-developed project plans that are ready for construction when funding becomes available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Passenger rail: To effectively compete with automobiles in time and convenience, passenger train service must be appropriately fast, frequent, safe, and reliable. Rail transit and regional passenger rail service must be convenient for travel at all times of day or night, not for just commuting to and from the city center for the beginning and end of business hours on weekdays.

Freight rail: All levels of government must take an intermodal approach to transportation policies to assure that public and private investments are made in a manner to encourage freight traffic to move via the safest, most energy efficient, and cost-effective mode.

Rail labor and education: The U.S Department of Transportation and Federal Railroad Administration should develop a comprehensive program to train and educate current U.S. railroad personnel in planning, designing and operating fast, frequent, reliable, and convenient rail passenger and freight service.

Rail electrification: The Federal government must establish a program with the nation's electric utilities and railroads to implement rail electrification nationwide. Electrified rail in heavily-polluted 'non-attainment' areas where trackside communities have been most heavily affected by diesel locomotives, should be a priority for a national rail electrification program.

Federal railroad policy reform: European-style 'open access' railroad policies need to be explored for the U.S., to enable nondiscriminatory access to the national rail network by a wide variety of freight and passenger rail operators.

The full statement is available [here](#).

