

CY 2023 Host Railroad Report Card & Route On-Time Performance

Amtrak grades host railroads based on delay-minutes, but the government's Metrics and Standards for On-Time Performance (OTP) are the best measure of passenger experience. Federal law requires that Amtrak trains receive preference over freight– but hosts often ignore this requirement and favor their own trains. As a result, most Amtrak National Network routes don't meet OTP standards.

	Host Railroad	2023 Grade	4-Year GPA
1	CPKC	A	4.11
2	CSX	B+	3.2
3	Canadian National	B+	3.31
4	BNSF	B	3.33
5	Norfolk Southern	B-	1.81
6	Union Pacific	C-	1.99

Long-Distance: 15/15 Routes Fail

Route	Class I Host(s)	Customers on Time	Meets 80% Standard?
City of New Orleans	CN	75%	Fail
Capitol Limited	NS, CSX	70%	
Lake Shore Limited	CSX, NS	69%	
Palmetto	CSX	67%	
Auto Train	CSX	66%	
Texas Eagle	BNSF, UP, CN	60%	
Coast Starlight	BNSF, UP	58%	
Cardinal	NS, CSX	58%	
Crescent	NS	57%	
Silver Meteor	CSX	53%	
Empire Builder	BNSF, CPKC	51%	
Silver Star	CSX, NS	49%	
Sunset Limited	BNSF, UP	44%	
Southwest Chief	BNSF	34%	
California Zephyr	BNSF, UP	33%	

State-Supported: Most Routes Fail

Route	Class I Host(s)	Customers on Time	Meets 80% Standard?
Keystone	Amtrak	94%	Pass
Pere Marquette	CSX, NS	87%	
Hiawatha	CPKC	86%	
New York - Albany	Amtrak	85%	
Capitol Corridor	UP	85%	
Downeaster	CSX	81%	
Pacific Surfliner	BNSF, UP	80%	
Carl Sandburg / IL Zephyr	BNSF	80%	
Illini / Saluki	CN	80%	Fail
Pennsylvanian	NS	79%	
Ethan Allen Express	CPKC	74%	
New York - Niagara Falls	CSX	74%	
Missouri River Runner	UP	74%	
Maple Leaf	CSX	73%	
Vermont	(other hosts)	70%	
Adirondack	Amtrak	69%	
Wolverine	NS, CN	69%	
Piedmont	NS	68%	
San Joaquins	BNSF, UP	66%	
Blue Water	NS, CN	66%	
Heartland Flyer	BNSF	64%	
Cascades	BNSF, UP	64%	
Lincoln Service	CN, UP	63%	
Carolinian	CSX, NS	61%	

Host Railroads are graded based on "host-responsible delay per minutes per 10,000 train-miles." 900 host-responsible delay minutes per 10,000 train-miles generally correlates with performance that results in Amtrak trains that are 80% on-time.

Why are Amtrak trains delayed by freight trains?

Frequently Asked Questions on Amtrak and Host Railroad Performance

1. What is a “host” railroad?

Most of Amtrak’s network consists of tracks owned, maintained, and dispatched by highly profitable freight railroads, known as “host” railroads where Amtrak uses their tracks. Most of the trains on these rail lines are the freight railroads’ own freight trains. Because the freight railroads make all dispatching decisions about which trains have priority, freight railroads have a tremendous amount of influence over Amtrak’s operations on their lines. Every year, Amtrak pays host railroads millions of dollars for use of their tracks and other resources.

2. Why doesn’t Amtrak own all of its rail lines?

Amtrak owns only 3% of the 21,400 route-miles traveled by Amtrak trains, primarily on the Northeast Corridor. The rest are mostly owned by freight railroads. Prior to Amtrak’s creation in 1971, railroads transported both freight and passengers. However, because the railroads were losing money on their passenger trains, Congress created Amtrak to relieve the private railroads of their obligation to operate passenger trains while retaining the efficient and economical way to transport large numbers of people in areas across the country. In return for relieving freight railroads of this obligation, there were two very important conditions:

- a. Amtrak would retain access to the railroads’ lines in order to operate passenger trains, and*
- b. Amtrak trains would receive preference over freight trains.*

3. Why are Amtrak trains delayed by freight trains?

Host railroads make all dispatching decisions regarding which trains are allowed to go first and which trains must wait. Federal law requires Amtrak passenger trains to receive preference over freight transportation, but the largest cause of delay to Amtrak trains on host railroads is “Freight Train Interference,” typically caused by a freight railroad requiring an Amtrak passenger train to wait so that its freight trains can operate first.

Host railroads often delay Amtrak trains, carrying hundreds of passengers, in favor of their trains carrying coal, garbage, crude oil, empty freight cars, or any other freight that the host chooses to prioritize over Amtrak passengers. Sometimes a host railroad will make Amtrak passengers trail a slower freight train, often for 50 to 100 miles, or wait in a siding while a lengthy freight train gets priority on the rail line. In the past several years, host railroads increasingly operate longer trains that can't fit in sidings, causing service issues along main routes. This means Amtrak trains are often forced to wait in sidings, causing more frequent and longer delays for passengers.

Freight trains caused 900,000 minutes of delay to Amtrak passengers in 2023 – that’s equivalent to over 1.5 years of passengers waiting for freight to go first.

For more information about Amtrak and freight railroads, please read our [white paper](#) on the subject.

4. Are freight railroads allowed to prioritize freight over people?

No! By federal law, with very few exceptions, Amtrak passenger trains must be given preference over freight trains on any rail line. Only the Department of Justice can enforce this law in court, and it has brought only one enforcement action against a freight company in Amtrak's history – over 40 years ago! As a result, freight railroads suffer no significant consequences for prioritizing their freight over you, our passenger.

An analogy to air travel puts this reality in perspective: what if air cargo carriers were responsible for air traffic control? Planeloads of travelers would be left circling above airports while cargo jets landed first unless there were effective regulatory mechanisms in place to protect passengers.

In 2020, following more than a decade of litigation by the host railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration finally adopted a Final Rule on Amtrak Metrics and Minimum Standards, as required by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. The Surface Transportation Board (STB) has the authority to investigate the causes of delay on Amtrak routes if customer on-time performance falls below 80% for two consecutive calendar quarters. If the STB finds that a host railroad has not given Amtrak trains statutory preference, it may award Amtrak damages and other relief. Amtrak made its first request for a Board investigation in December 2022, asking the STB to investigate delays on the *Sunset Limited* route and to award relief to Amtrak for preference violations.

5. How many passengers should arrive on time?

The minimum standard set by federal rule is that 80% of customers should arrive at their destination within 15 minutes of the scheduled time. On many services, our expectations are even higher. As delays increase, it becomes harder to achieve the 80% standard. Amtrak is focused on reducing the delays we can control, and we expect host railroads – which are responsible for two-thirds of the delays experienced by passengers – to follow the law that requires these railroads to put people first.

6. Are there costs to all of these delays?

Yes. Freight train delays waste the valuable time of our passengers – 900,000 minutes in 2023 – and even more when other delays caused by host railroads are included. In addition, there are substantial costs incurred by Amtrak, states, and the federal government. A [recent study](#) estimated that Amtrak could realize one-time savings of \$336 million, and annual savings of \$41.9 million, if Amtrak trains were able to operate reliably. This money could be invested in providing better Amtrak service across the country.

7. What other types of delays are host railroads responsible for?

While freight train interference is the number one contributor of delays to Amtrak passengers, there are other types of host-responsible delays that can affect our customers. This includes signal delays, maintenance of way delays, slow order delays, planned detours, and unplanned routing delays.

8. If a train is always late, then why not just change the schedule?

Amtrak schedules are negotiated with freight railroads and already include substantial amounts of padding, known as “recovery time,” to allow trains to be on time even when delays occur. Amtrak has sometimes tried lengthening schedules, but this approach is usually ineffective at improving performance on freight railroads, since hosts often use this additional time in the schedule to continue to prioritize their own trains. We have sometimes added hours to Amtrak train schedules, only to see customers arrive even later than they did before. Longer schedules are less convenient for passengers and prevent Amtrak from fulfilling its mandate to offer service that is competitive with other modes of travel. Longer schedules also increase Amtrak’s crew and equipment costs.

9. Is there any incentive for freight railroads to deliver Amtrak trains on time?

Yes. Amtrak offers financial incentives to host railroads for providing reliable performance. However these incentives have proven to be ineffective for many hosts, which continue to prioritize freight trains and delay Amtrak passengers.

10. How does Amtrak evaluate host performance?

Amtrak evaluates host performance based on “host-responsible delay minutes per 10,000 train-miles,” which measures how much delay each host railroad causes to Amtrak trains. The measure is normalized by the number of miles traveled by each train (a “train-mile”) so that routes of different lengths, and hosts with different levels of Amtrak service, can be compared to each other.

11. What distinguishes host railroads with good Amtrak performance?

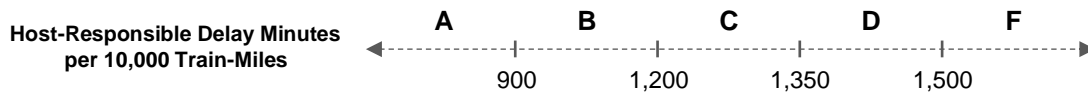
When host railroads achieve good Amtrak performance – meaning Amtrak trains consistently operate with limited delay over their rail lines – it is typically attributable to a combination of the following:

- *A commitment to providing quality service for Amtrak’s passengers,*
- *An active partnership with Amtrak, where both sides work collaboratively and the host respects federal law, which protects the rights of our passengers, and*
- *A well-disciplined operation, which benefits both Amtrak and freight customers alike.*

Notes

Amtrak Host Railroad Report Card 2023

1. Amtrak measures host railroad performance based on “minutes of host-responsible delay per 10,000 train-miles,” which measures the minutes of delay caused by each host, normalized by the number of miles traveled by each train and multiplied by 10,000.
2. Grades indicate aggregate host-responsible delays across all routes on each host. Performance on specific routes can vary.
3. Grades are awarded on the following scale:



4. The 4-year rolling GPA is calculated by finding the average minutes of delay per 10,000 train miles from 2020-2023.
5. 900 host-responsible delay minutes per 10,000 train-miles is generally correlated to performance that results in 80% of Amtrak customers arriving on-time.
6. Host railroads are ranked on the Report Card based on 2023 host-responsible delay minutes per 10,000 train-miles.
7. Canadian National’s Quebec operations are excluded from the report card calculations.

Amtrak Route Grades 2023

1. “On-time performance” (OTP) represents the percentage of customers that arrive at their destination station within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time, consistent with the standard adopted by federal rule.
2. OTP figures are based on 2023 calendar year performance.
3. The route grade table only lists Class I freight host railroads that host more than 15 miles of the given route, using the following abbreviations:

BNSF	BNSF Railway
CN	Canadian National Railway
CPKC	Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railway
CSX	CSX Transportation
NS	Norfolk Southern Railway
UP	Union Pacific Railroad