

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**

Grades reflect the passenger experience

A	Most passengers are on-time
B	Passengers on some routes are late
C	Many passengers are very late
D	Most passengers are very late
F	Majority of passengers are severely late

Amtrak Route Grades 2019

How many passengers are on time?

Passing grade: 80% of customers are on time within 15 minutes

State-Supported Trains	Route	Class I Freight Host Railroads	Percentage of On-Time Customers	
<i>19 of 27 routes fail to achieve 80% standard</i>	Keystone	(other hosts)	93%	PASS
	Hiawatha	CP	92%	
	New York – Albany	(other hosts)	91%	
	Springfield Shuttles	(other hosts)	88%	
	Capitol Corridor	UP	87%	
	Ethan Allen Express	CP	85%	
	Downeaster	(other hosts)	82%	
	Vermonteer	(other hosts)	82%	
	Carl Sandburg / Illinois Zephyr	BNSF	77%	
	Richmond / Newport News / Norfolk	CSX, NS	76%	
	Piedmont	NS	75%	
	Adirondack	CN, CP	73%	
	Pacific Surfliner	BNSF, UP	73%	
	Lincoln Service	CN, UP	73%	
	Roanoke	NS	70%	
	Pennsylvanian	NS	70%	
	Maple Leaf	CSX	67%	
	New York – Niagara Falls	CSX	66%	
	San Joaquins	BNSF, UP	64%	
	Carolinian	CSX, NS	64%	
	Missouri River Runner	UP	63%	
	Cascades	BNSF, UP	63%	
	Pere Marquette	CSX, NS	62%	
	Heartland Flyer	BNSF	53%	
	Blue Water	NS, CN	39%	
	Illini / Saluki	CN	30%	
	Wolverine	NS, CN	27%	
<i>15 of 15 routes fail to achieve 80% standard</i>	City of New Orleans	CN	73%	FAIL
	Palmetto	CSX	63%	
	Cardinal	NS, CSX	55%	
	Auto Train	CSX	54%	
	Coast Starlight	BNSF, UP	51%	
	Lake Shore Limited	CSX, NS	48%	
	Empire Builder	BNSF, CP	47%	
	Silver Meteor	CSX	44%	
	Silver Star	CSX, NS	34%	
	California Zephyr	BNSF, UP	33%	
	Southwest Chief	BNSF	33%	
	Capitol Limited	NS, CSX	31%	
	Crescent	NS	31%	
	Texas Eagle	BNSF, UP, CN	27%	
	Sunset Limited	BNSF, UP	21%	

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 needed to operate Amtrak trains.

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 an 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 follow the same freight train – moving at a much slower speed than a passenger train – for 50 to 100 miles, or force Amtrak passengers to wait in a siding while a freight train that is too long to fit in any sidings on the rail line is prioritized first.

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.

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. Unfortunately, only the Department of Justice can enforce this law, and it has brought only one enforcement action against a freight company in Amtrak’s history – and that was over 40 years ago! As a result, freight railroads suffer no significant consequences for prioritizing their freight over you, our passenger.

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

5. *Are there costs to all of these delays?*

Freight train delays waste the valuable time of our passengers – 1 million minutes in 2019, and even more when other delays caused by host railroads are included. In addition, there are real 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. That’s why we need freight railroads to follow the law and put people first.

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

Amtrak offers financial incentives to host railroads for providing reliable performance, however these incentives have proven to be ineffective for some hosts, which continue to prioritize their trains and delay Amtrak passengers even though they could earn financial incentives for good performance.

7. *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.

8. *What does a poor grade on the Host Railroad Report Card represent?*

Put in perspective, a host receiving an “F” typically forces each Amtrak train on a particular route to wait more than an hour per trip on average for freight trains alone, and may make Amtrak passengers wait for 2 hours or more as their freight trains operate first. This is an unreasonable inconvenience to our nation’s passengers. Imagine you were on a flight and your plane had to circle the destination airport for hours while cargo flights were given priority to use the runway!

9. *What distinguishes host railroads with good Amtrak performance?*

Host railroads typically achieve good Amtrak performance – meaning Amtrak trains consistently operate with limited delay over their rail lines – through a combination of the following:

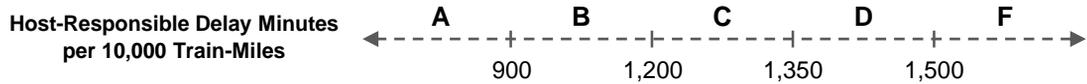
- *A commitment to providing quality service for Amtrak’s passengers;*
- *An active partnership with Amtrak, where both sides work collaboratively and the host respects federal law which protects the rights of our passengers; and*
- *A well-disciplined operation, which benefits both Amtrak and freight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

10. *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 there are delays. Amtrak has sometimes tried lengthening schedules, but this approach is usually ineffective at improving performance on freight railroads because some freight railroads use this additional time in the schedule to continue to prioritize their own trains, resulting in even more delays to Amtrak passengers. 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. They also increase Amtrak’s crew and equipment costs.

Notes

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. 900 host-responsible delay minutes per 10,000 train-miles is roughly correlated to performance that results in Amtrak trains that are 80% on-time.
5. Canadian National’s Quebec operations are excluded from the report card calculations.
6. “On-time performance” (OTP) represents the percentage of customers that arrive at their destination station within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time.
7. OTP figures are based on 2019 calendar year performance.
8. 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
 - CP Canadian Pacific Railway
 - CSX CSX Transportation
 - NS Norfolk Southern Railway
 - UP Union Pacific Railroad