

Amtrak Host Railroad Report Card: CY 2022



Our host railroad grades are based on delays to passengers – and we’re grading on a curve.

Providing Amtrak passengers preference over freight trains was part of the deal that created Amtrak and relieved freight railroads of the obligation to provide passenger services – and it’s the law. But too many freight railroads ignore the law. Imagine 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.

See which railroads made the grade >>

| | Host Railroad | 2022 Grade | 4-Year GPA |
|---|-------------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Canadian Pacific | A+ | 4.11 |
| 2 | CSX | B | 3.20 |
| 3 | BNSF | B | 3.33 |
| 4 | Canadian National | B- | 2.75 |
| 5 | Norfolk Southern | D- | 1.26 |
| 6 | Union Pacific | F | 2.19 |

We want both freight and passenger rail to succeed!

America has the largest rail network in the world, and there is no reason why we cannot have both a world-class freight rail network and reliable intercity passenger rail service.

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The largest cause of delay to Amtrak passengers is freight train interference.

Freight Train Interference is typically caused by a freight railroad making Amtrak passengers wait so that its freight trains can operate first. Federal law requires Amtrak to receive preference over freight but too often that law is ignored by some freight railroads.

Freight trains caused nearly 1.1 million minutes of delay to Amtrak passengers in 2022.

The Federal Railroad Administration "Metrics and Standards" rule sets the On-Time Performance standard: 80% of customers must arrive on time.

Miss the standard, and the Surface Transportation Board can investigate to determine the causes, and if Amtrak's right to preference was violated, the freight railroad may face penalties.

See how your Amtrak route fared >>

Long Distance: 15 of 15 routes fail to meet standard

| Route | Class I Host Railroad | Percentage of On-Time Customers | Meet the 80% standard? |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Palmetto | CSX | 70% | Failed |
| Lake Shore Limited | CSX, NS | 63% | |
| City of New Orleans | CN | 61% | |
| Crescent | NS | 57% | |
| Silver Meteor | CSX | 54% | |
| Coast Starlight | UP, BNSF | 53% | |
| Empire Builder | BNSF, CP | 47% | |
| Cardinal | CSX, NS | 45% | |
| Texas Eagle | UP, BNSF, CN | 45% | |
| Capitol Limited | NS, CSX | 40% | |
| Auto Train | CSX | 40% | |
| Silver Star | CSX, NS | 28% | |
| Southwest Chief | BNSF | 27% | |
| California Zephyr | UP, BNSF | 25% | |
| Sunset Limited | UP, BNSF | 19% | |

State-Supported: More than half of routes fail to meet standard

| Route | Class I Host Railroad | Percentage of On-Time Customers | Meet the 80% standard? |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Keystone | Amtrak | 95% | Passed |
| Hiawatha | CP | 92% | |
| New York - Albany | Amtrak | 89% | |
| Capitol Corridor | UP | 85% | |
| Downeaster | CSX | 82% | |
| Pacific Surfliner | UP, BNSF | 81% | |
| Adirondack | Amtrak | 80% | |
| Ethan Allen Express | CP | 79% | Failed |
| Maple Leaf | CSX | 78% | |
| Vermont | (other hosts) | 77% | |
| Carl Sandburg / Illinois Zephyr | BNSF | 77% | |
| Pere Marquette | CSX, NS | 77% | |
| New York - Niagara Falls | CSX | 77% | |
| San Joaquins | BNSF, UP | 73% | |
| Piedmont | NS | 72% | |
| Pennsylvanian | NS | 72% | |
| Lincoln Service | UP, CN | 69% | |
| Blue Water | CN, NS | 66% | |
| Carolinian | CSX, NS | 63% | |
| Wolverine | NS, CN | 61% | |
| Missouri River Runner | UP | 60% | |
| Illini / Saluki | CN | 57% | |
| Heartland Flyer | BNSF | 57% | |
| Cascades | BNSF, UP | 56% | |

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 over 1,000,000 minutes of delay to Amtrak passengers in 2022 – that’s equivalent to almost 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. 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.

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

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 – 1 million minutes in 2022 – 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?

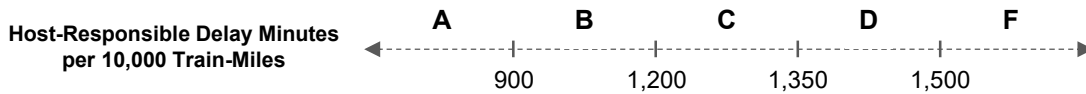
When host railroads achieve good Amtrak performance – meaning Amtrak trains consistently operate with limited delay over their rail lines – it is typically attributable to a combination of the following:

- *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 2022

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 2019-2022.
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 2022 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 2022

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 2022 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 |
| CP | Canadian Pacific Railway |
| CSX | CSX Transportation |
| NS | Norfolk Southern Railway |
| UP | Union Pacific Railroad |