

#### Page One

Indiana's Response to Amtrak's Proposed Service Cuts

#### Page Two

Toward Sustainable Indy <-> Chicago Passenger Rail

#### Page Three

Hoosier State Conceptual Infrastructure Plan (Installment 1 of 3)

#### Page Four

Indiana State Budget Agency's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

#### Page Five

Railroad Tracks NIPRA Accomplishments—2019

#### Page Six

First in a Series: Has Amtrak Declared War?

#### Page Nine

Bullets from the Board

#### Page Eleven

Riding the Rails

#### Page Thirteen

Discounts For More Information

#### Page Fourteen

IPRA Membership Form

## INDIANA'S RESPONSE TO AMTRAK'S PROPOSED SERVICE CUTS

By: Steven Coxhead, IPRA President

As some of you might be aware, **William Flynn**, President & CEO of **Amtrak**, has announced his intention to carry out severe service cuts in **Amtrak** long distance routes. All long distance routes would be cut to three days per week. IPRA, RPA and others, feel that such service cuts are an inappropriate response to conditions resulting from the current COVID-19 pandemic. Several members of the U.S. Congress feel the same way. The recently passed **CARES Act** provided **Amtrak** with significant relief to offset the loss of ridership attributed to the pandemic. Several letters have been sent by US Senators to **Amtrak**, objecting to Mr. Flynn's plans. We have been informed by the office of Indiana's own **Senator Mike Braun** that he has agreed to sign the following letter:

William Flynn  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Amtrak  
60 Massachusetts Ave NE  
Washington, DC 20002



Dear Mr. Flynn,

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic Congress passed the CARES Act, which provided Amtrak with \$1.02 billion to alleviate the severe economic impact COVID-19 produced. You have asked Congress to provide record levels of taxpayer funding, yet, in your supplemental funding request for Fiscal Year 2021 you are proposing to cut service and staff during an unprecedented time. We are deeply concerned by the downsizing plan outlined in your supplemental funding request and believe it to be contrary to public interest. These cuts would not only dramatically reduce the utility of the nation's passenger rail network, but would also ignore Congressional intent to expedite economic recovery following the pandemic.

Amtrak's plan to terminate one out of every five employees would put thousands of Americans out of work at a time when millions of Americans have lost their jobs. This severe reduction in workforce raises serious doubts about whether a realistic plan exists for fully restoring service in a timely fashion. Your plan also calls for reducing the frequency of all National Network long-distance trains, while consolidating three routes into one, thus greatly reducing Amtrak's ability to operate its Network at full capacity. These actions will eliminate thousands of points of connection and

dramatically reduce the utility of Amtrak as a transportation provider, irrevocably hurting hundreds of communities and small towns already devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In your FY2021 supplemental funding request you stated “[w]e understand how important Amtrak service is to the nation and, particularly, small communities across the nation where we play a unique role in connecting these communities to the rest of America.” Your request, unfortunately, does not reflect that understanding.

As Congress considers your supplementary request for FY2021, we ask that you provide the following information:

- **How much would it cost to maintain the current service levels on all long-distance routes?**
- How does the cost of retaining the current workforce in active status, ready to return to work, compare with that of hiring and training new employees?
- **By reducing the workforce, what is your desired outcome? Why?**
- What ridership metrics will Amtrak use to decide when to restore capacity, and how will they account for the reduced demand signal resulting from fewer frequencies and connections? Do you plan to restore service in phases?
- **You wrote restoring these frequencies will be “subject to adequate funding;” What does Amtrak consider adequate funding?**

Thank you for your time and cooperation, we look forward to your response.

IPRA would very much like to thank *Senator Braun* for his support in this manner.

Also, see online at <https://railpassengers.org/happening-now/news/releases/rail-passengers-statement-on-amtrak-service-reductions/> for a Press Release about the Amtrak service reductions from the **Rail Passengers Association (RPA)**.

## Toward Sustainable Indy <-> Chicago Passenger Rail

By: Arvid Olson, IPRA Board Member

Often, when you read about a successful public works project groundbreaking or completion, you may miss the backstory. The reality is that many of these projects have been years in the making as they move through identification of need, concept, engineering, funding, permitting, and construction.

**The same could be said about the perceived lack of progress in operating sustainable Indianapolis to/from Chicago passenger rail. It’s been more than a year since daily service between these two large cities has ceased.**

Fortunately, there is encouraging news. The state of Indiana commissioned and released an extensive **Conceptual Infrastructure Plan** in late 2019. This document outlined projects that would help to improve the Indianapolis to Chicago route of the *Hoosier State* passenger train.

In addition, the State provided a ‘ready for funding’ placeholder in the **2020 Midwestern States Passenger Rail Projects** list. This placeholder provides a path for applying for **State of Good Repair** funding in the coming months for the most shovel-ready project that will help to provide improved passenger rail transportation.

Within this process is an opportunity for active advocacy from IPRA in gathering support at the statewide level as well as with elected officials and municipalities.

The recommendations for the new *Hoosier State* include multiple daily round trips and clearly identified route improvements that would, upon completion, substantially reduce trip time and improve the quality of travel.

With the upcoming completion of the *South Shore* West Lake Extension, passengers will see a reduction in Indianapolis – Chicago trip time of more than one hour in each direction. In addition, by eliminating multiple freight railroad crossings in Illinois as well as Chicago Union Station gate fees, the cost savings allow for increasing round trip frequency between downtown Indianapolis and Millennium Station in downtown Chicago.

There remains much to be done, but the opportunity for active advocacy and collaboration in bringing frequent daily round trip service between two large metropolitan areas is genuinely exciting!

## Hoosier State Conceptual Infrastructure Plan (Installment 1 of 3)

By: Steve Coxhead, President, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) has commissioned a study providing some possible answers to the question of what it would take, and what would it cost, to run an improved daily *Hoosier State* passenger train service in the Indianapolis-Lafayette-Chicago corridor. In this, and the next two, editions of "All Aboard Indiana", IPRA will present its review of the study. We will start with a general overview, and then take a look at physical plant improvements that must be made, and an estimated cost associated with those improvements.

The November 2019 Intercity Passenger Rail Conceptual Infrastructure Plan document may be found on the INDOT website as "Passenger Rail Infrastructure Plan" at: <https://www.in.gov/indot/2394.htm>.

If you have problems in viewing, downloading or printing the document, please send us a note at [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org), requesting assistance.

First of all, a word about what the document is not. The document is a conceptual study. It attempts to provide answers to a specific, narrowly defined, hypothetical question about the corridor. It does not represent a commitment on the part of INDOT or the State of Indiana to take any action regarding service in the corridor. There is at the moment no funding to support execution of the measures described in the plan. What it does do is give valuable answers to some questions which would have to be answered before an improved *Hoosier State* passenger train service could be instituted.

Current passenger service in the corridor is provided three days a week by Amtrak's *Cardinal*, which runs between New York City and Chicago. It provides one northbound train in the morning and one southbound train in the evening. Before being discontinued, Amtrak operated the *Hoosier State* on the same schedule as the *Cardinal*, on the four days per week that *Cardinal* service was not available. Most of us familiar with the situation would agree that it did not really provide an acceptable level of service. There were problems with on time performance, an inconvenient schedule, and an insufficient number of daily trains (frequency). If the *Hoosier State* is to be brought back, it must be a significant

improvement over what it most recently was. Only in this case will it be a transportation option that Hoosiers choose because of its value, instead of being the only option available to them.

An improved situation might be something like the following.

Assume two *Hoosier State* trains, in each direction, each day (two round trips per day) with service seven days per week. Thus, it would be possible to start at either end of the corridor in the morning, travel to the other end, and return in the same day. Amtrak's *Cardinal* would continue to traverse the corridor on its three day per week schedule. The schedule for the *Hoosier State* trains would be arranged for the convenience of traveling Hoosiers, not for a train linking Chicago and New York City. Now, there has, and continues to be, agitation for Amtrak to expand *Cardinal* service to seven days per week. This would be all to the good, as in that case, one might see three round trips per day in the corridor. The end result would be improved frequency and better schedules, thus making travel more convenient.

Previously, trains on the corridor had to deal with multiple dispatchers (five or six) to traverse the relatively short distance from Dyer, Indiana, to Chicago Union Station. This led to serious delays, hence poor on time performance. With the completion of the exciting new West Lake Corridor of the *South Shore Line* (Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District - NICTD) providing service to Dyer, it would be possible for the *Hoosier State* to terminate in Dyer. Passengers would then do a cross platform transfer to a *South Shore Line* train and continue on into Millennium Station in downtown Chicago. It should be noted that the *South Shore Line* has a very good on time performance record. This solves the problem of the multiple dispatchers, and leads to a significant improvement in on time performance.



South Shore Line trainset

Passenger trains are restricted to a maximum speed of 59 mph in the mostly CSX corridor from Indianapolis to Chicago. Physical plant (a.k.a. track & signal) improvements would enable the maximum speed to be raised to 79 mph. This leads to a better schedule by shortening total trip time.

**Finally, it is proposed that an additional station be built at Indianapolis International Airport. This would enhance the traffic of the airport, by making it an attractive alternative to Chicago's O'Hare International. A convenient multimodal rail connection would appeal to travelers coming from, or going to, Chicago.**

The conceptual plan presents a hypothetical set of schedules for two round trips per day, 79 mph maximum speed, and cross platform transfer in Dyer. Included in the plan document is a detailed examination of improvements to be made in the corridor, as well as cost estimates for each improvement, and the project as a whole. In subsequent issues of "All Aboard Indiana" we will be taking a closer look at both the physical plant improvements and project cost.

**It should be noted that the physical plant in the corridor is currently owned by CSX Transportation, and so any improvements would require their consent and cooperation.**

The plan document does not address operating costs and revenues. Only capital costs are considered. IPRA does believe that a high quality service on the corridor would be able to generate enough fare box revenue to cover a substantial portion (if not all) of operating costs once the service were to be established.

**So, if development of the corridor along the lines sketched in the conceptual plan document is of concern to you, please communicate with your State Representative and State Senator, to let them know your feelings. And it certainly couldn't hurt to communicate with the Governor's office along the same lines. The first step would be for the State to begin seeking funding sources for the necessary work. Let us know about your conversations at: [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org)!**

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## Indiana State Budget Agency's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Provided by: Tim Maloney, IPRA Board Member

May 22, 2020

INDIANAPOLIS – **Governor Eric J. Holcomb** today announced he has asked the **State Budget Agency (SBA)** to initiate plans to reduce state agency appropriations by 15 percent for Fiscal Year 2021 because of the sharp drop in state revenues that was reported for April and to prepare for a continued decline in state revenue because of the economic impact of COVID-19.

"This is the first of what is likely to be a number of steps we'll take to rein in state spending while we continue to provide critical government services to Hoosiers without interruption," Gov. Holcomb said. "It will be imperative that we effectively manage our resources. During the last economic downturn, the state's general fund revenues were nearly \$3 billion less than forecasted. SBA estimates we could face an even greater loss of general fund revenue in the final 14 months of this biennium."

SBA already has initiated actions to reduce spending for the remainder of the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. Cost savings measures were instituted in April to review operations, space, travel, hiring and many other areas for savings.

In addition to the state agency reversions, Gov. Holcomb said the state would not move forward or put on hold several previously announced projects:

- Use of \$291 million in reserves to pay for several capital projects approved in the 2020 legislative session. Bonding authority may be used to move forward with those projects later
- Approximately \$65 million in Next Level Trails grants
- \$110 million of deferred maintenance projects, including \$70 million for state parks

"By taking immediate action to tighten our belts across state government, we will maintain maximum flexibility to navigate a still very uncertain economic picture. All options are on the table, and as we approach tax filing deadlines and better understand all of the federal funds available to Indiana, we will make more precise adjustments ahead of crafting a budget for next biennium," Gov. Holcomb said.

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## Railroad Tracks

This slice of knowledge courtesy of: L.S. Walters, Passenger Rail Expert

**The U.S. standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.**

Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriates designed the U.S. Railroads.

**Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways and that's the gauge they used.**

Why did they use that gauge then? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they had used for building wagons which used that wheel spacing.

**Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing the wagon wheels would break on some of the old long distance roads in England because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.**

So, who built those old rutted roads? Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (including England) for their legions. Those roads have been used ever since.

**And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels.**

Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing. Therefore, the United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. In other words, bureaucracies live forever. So the next time you are handed a specification, procedure, or process, and wonder, "What dummy came up with this?" you may be exactly right. Imperial Roman army chariots were made just wide enough accommodate the rear ends of two war horses.

**Now, here's the twist to the story:**

When you see a space shuttle sitting on its launch pad, you will notice that there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket

boosters or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs would have preferred to make them a bit larger but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains and the SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track and the railroad track as you now know is about as wide as two horses' behinds. So, a major space shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's behind!

**And you thought that wasn't important!**

Now you know... horses' asses control almost everything!

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## NIPRA Accomplishments—2019

By: Dorothy Hagan, Member, Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA)

IPRA's sister organization, the Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA) has been very busy in the year 2019. Here is a list of NIPRA's accomplishments:



- ◆ Hired web master
- ◆ Revised NIPRA Website
- ◆ Revised By-Laws
- ◆ Created and distributed over 100 Economic Development Brochures
- ◆ Began planning for newly conceived Indiana Passenger Rail Commission
- ◆ Added two new NIPRA Board members
- ◆ Joined Hoosier Environmental Council
- ◆ Sent letter to Governor seeking newly discovered funds be used for passenger rail
- ◆ Gained Greater Fort Wayne, Inc. support of passenger rail in their transportation goals
- ◆ Promoted coordination between NIPRA and Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA)

- ◆ Attended Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Council (MORPC) presentation in Lima, OH on Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima-Columbus-Pittsburg Passenger Rail Corridor
- ◆ Contracted with HNTB for completion of Benefit-Cost Analysis
- ◆ Presented Certificate of Appreciation for Victor Martin

## First in a Series: Has Amtrak Declared War?

By: David Peter Alan, Contributing Editor, Railway Age Magazine

*Editor's Note: This July 4, 2020 article has been reprinted with permission from **Railway Age** magazine. Go online to <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/intercity/first-in-a-series-has-amtrak-declared-war> to read this entire article along with all associated photographs.*



This writer began working on this series on June 19. It was Juneteenth, the day an increasing number of Americans of all colors and heritages now view as an occasion to celebrate freedom. Part of the freedom that many Americans treasure is the freedom to travel, as stated in the First Amendment of the Constitution. The “right to travel” is one thing, in the sense that government cannot unduly restrict travel (as questionable as that assumption may appear these days), but there is also the issue that this sacred “right” can be limited if access to mobility is also limited. Millions of Americans who depend on Amtrak for part of their travel are about to lose a significant portion of the mobility they have today.

Amtrak declared war on its riders by imposing, effective Oct. 1, 2020 (the first day of its 2021 fiscal year), service cuts on long

-distance (LD) trains so severe that the national passenger train network, as we have known it for nearly 50 years, will cease to exist. It could become as irrelevant as Canada’s two famous long-distance trains, the *Canadian* and the *Ocean*, that once brought people from Toronto to the western provinces and from Montreal to Atlantic Canada. At the present time, neither of those trains are running.

To make matters worse, Amtrak is implementing additional cuts, eliminating one of the two daily trains between New York and Florida on July 6, without waiting for its own threatened implementation date of Oct. 1. Either the *Silver Meteor* or the *Silver Star*, which run on different routes in the Carolinas, will operate on any given day, but not both. In effect, Amtrak has fired the first major volley in its campaign against L-D trains and the people who ride them. For anyone who cares about keeping them, the time for action is now.

Amtrak has announced it will reduce the frequency of every L-D train in its skeletal network to only three times per week, rather than running every day, with only two exceptions. On Oct. 1, not one single person will be able to walk or take transit to any Amtrak station and get on a long-distance train without checking first to see if that train is operating that day, if Amtrak gets its way. [William C. Vantuono, our Editor-in-Chief, reported the story here on June 16 \(Amtrak Slashing Service. Will It Be Permanent?\)](#).

There is much more to the story, though, especially how it will affect Amtrak’s riders, whether they come from the cities or the smaller towns that Amtrak serves, and whether they are motorists or depend on Amtrak and local transit for all of their mobility.

Amtrak claims that it is making these cuts for economic reasons, related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of ridership that has accompanied it. Given Amtrak’s announced ideology and recent history, this writer finds Amtrak’s assertion very difficult to believe. It appears, instead, that Amtrak plans to phase out the L-D trains and become a disjointed set of short corridors, at least in the short run. The first cut takes effect July 6. Everyone who cares about viable trains to ride must fight as hard as possible to keep those trains operating daily, while also making a best effort to get the allies needed for victory. For anyone who wants the trains to keep running, this is not the time for rivalries or distractions. It is the time to fight.

On June 15, [Texas Rail Advocates posted the notice of the proposed cuts from Roger Harris, former airline executive and now Chief Marketing and Revenue Office for Amtrak.](#)

The organization also blasted Amtrak for the proposed cuts, saying: "In what has been described as a 'slash and burn' mentality, passenger rail carrier Amtrak is set to cut service on its national network trains from daily service to tri-weekly" and "Texas and other states would be severely impacted by cutting daily train service to midsize and smaller towns and cities already struggling with either reduced or no air or intercity bus service" (Id). Other passenger rail advocates and their organizations have leveled similar criticisms against Amtrak since the service reductions were announced.

This writer is a regular Amtrak rider, and has been since Amtrak started in 1971, having logged about 900,000 miles on Amtrak over the years, ridden every mile of the system, and visited more than 400 destinations now served by Amtrak (and about 30 places where Amtrak no longer goes). Will those totals ever increase to 450 destinations or one million miles? That will depend on what happens over the next three months.

William J. Flynn, another former airline executive, is now the head of Amtrak, although his predecessor, fellow airline man Richard Anderson, is still around for now. [This writer speculated about Amtrak's future here in Railway Age on May 24 \(From Anderson to Flynn to ... ????\)](#). Now we have the answer, and Amtrak's future looks significantly worse, at least for many of Amtrak's employees and millions of riders.

On May 25 in a 12-page letter to Vice President Mike Pence (as President of the Senate) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Flynn demanded a supplemental appropriation of \$1.475 billion for the next fiscal year (at 2), which begins Oct. 1. Download it here: [Amtrak-Supplemental-FY21-Funding-Letter-to-Congress-Final-Signed-5.25.20](#).

The letter listed every L-D train and explicitly identified the status of each of those trains (except for the [Auto Train](#); more on that later) as "service at risk" (at 12). Even with the supplemental appropriation that Amtrak demanded, service on the long-distance trains would become "reduced service" (Id.). We now know what that would mean. The Florida train situation is especially noteworthy, because Amtrak implemented the threatened service cuts effective July 6.

Thus, it appears that Amtrak management is arbitrarily and capriciously implementing its threat before even Congress, USDOT officials, advocates for the riders, or even the riders themselves, will have any opportunity to take notice of a particular threat and react to it. If the Florida train action is

not evidence of Amtrak's reckless disregard for its customers, it is difficult to imagine what is. Amtrak is also implementing these service reductions without clear and obvious notice to any stakeholders, including potential riders, until they attempt to navigate the "reservations" section of the Amtrak website. It appears, at least to this writer, that Amtrak is jumping the gun by starting to implement its own threat almost three months prior to its official implementation date. This looks like malicious intent.

Amtrak's timing may demonstrate such intent. The Amtrak statute, 49 U.S. Code §24706(a) states that Amtrak must give 180 days' notice before "discontinuing service over a route," whatever that means. On an "entire route" basis, there would still be some trains running, but a majority of the trains on every L-D route would be "discontinued" under Amtrak's plan. The current situation could be covered by §24706(b)(1)(A), which allows Amtrak to discontinue service during "the first month of a fiscal year if the authorization of appropriations and the appropriations for Amtrak are not enacted at least 90 days before the beginning of the fiscal year ... " because the new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1. As that provision is worded, it may already be too late for Congress to increase Amtrak's appropriation to cover daily operation of the L-D trains and be sure that those trains will, indeed, operate every day. Of course, Congress has the authority to change or override that provision and require that Amtrak continue daily operation on the affected trains. We will have more on that later in this series.

Under Amtrak's now-announced plan, the state-supported corridors and trains may or may not do much better, depending on whether Amtrak gets its way. Regarding them, Flynn wrote, "With no supplemental FY21 funding, many services will be suspended or operating on a skeleton schedule. Several services would likely be shut down entirely, and in the event that they were later able to restart, they would require significant resources to do so. Many of Amtrak's PRIIA Sec. 209 state partners have stressed the need for federal funds in lieu of state payments" (at 11). Alternatively, "With the requested supplemental FY21 funding, most, if not all, of the Sec. 209 services will resume. However, some services are likely to operate on a reduced schedule for some of FY21" (Id.). The demand letter indicates that the L-D trains could get the axe if Amtrak does not get the requested appropriation, while they could still be hampered somehow by the proposed service reductions, even if Congress complies with Amtrak's demand and the Administration agrees. At least most of the state-supported trains would survive if Amtrak gets the money it wants.

Ironically, some state-supported trains will continue to run every day (although some states have suspended the trains within their borders due to the COVID-19 virus), while their connecting trains would run only three times per week. Jordan Green reported that irony in the June 21 edition of Oklahoma City's paper, the *Oklahoman*: "Though the [Heartland] Flyer's frequency hasn't been reduced, the schedule of other major trains in the region will be ... The *Texas Eagle*, a long-distance train connecting Chicago to Los Angeles, passes through Dallas. The *Southwest Chief*, another long-distance train, passes through Kansas and also connects Chicago to Los Angeles. Both trains will begin operating three days per week beginning Oct. 1, the start of Amtrak's new fiscal year." The *Heartland Flyer* runs between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth. Such is the patchwork of service that Amtrak is plans, complete with questionable connections.

If Amtrak gets its way, the Northeast Corridor (NEC) would survive with "moderate-normal service," while, if not, there would be "greatly reduced service" on the *Acela* trains and merely "reduced service" on the other trains on the NEC (Flynn letter at 11). Advocates for the NEC have been at odds during the past few years with advocates for the rest of the system, who claim that Amtrak is taking money from the rest of the country to feed the NEC, which has turned into an insatiable money pit. Some have even said that the L-D trains would be profitable if their riders were not forced by Amtrak's questionable non-GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) accounting to subsidize the NEC. We do not have full knowledge of the facts, because nobody seems to believe Amtrak's numbers or trust Amtrak's accounting methods.

In any event, the NEC will survive somehow, whatever else happens to Amtrak. Amtrak's NEC Future project may not be the answer ultimately, but there are plans now under consideration like AIRNet-21 (proposed by the J.P. Morgan organization), *AmeriStarRail* (endorsed by former Amtrak CEO Paul Reistrup), and several other plans proposed by private advocates that could also be included in future discussions. There was also a proposal from the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University that would have emphasized operations on the NEC by local railroads such as New Jersey Transit.

In short, the corridors will still have daily service at some level, even if some of the trains on the NEC are eliminated. If Amtrak cuts service from two daily trains in each direction to one (as could happen on some Midwestern routes) it would constitute a highly adverse event for the riders and the state (s) involved, but limiting travel only to certain days of the

week would be much worse.

For the state-supported trains, and especially for the long-distance trains, Amtrak is the only game in town. Until the COVID-19 virus hit, ridership everywhere on Amtrak had been growing, including on the L-D trains. Those trains have kept running their full schedules through the crisis, and they are still running today. Advocates had consistently given Amtrak high marks for keeping them going. If Amtrak management implements its plan, though, they will begin their death-spiral later this year.

The prognosis is grim. Amtrak management knows or should know that, because "America's Railroad" has been there before. In the mid-1990s, Amtrak hired Mercer Management, a consulting firm, to help cut costs. Mercer convinced Amtrak to eliminate a number of routes, and to cut the frequencies on several L-D trains to three or four days per week. The eastern trains were spared, except that the Crescent ran south of Atlanta to New Orleans only three times a week.

The only L-D train west of Chicago that still operated every day was the *Southwest Chief* between Chicago and Los Angeles. Ironically, that is the train that former CEO Anderson targeted for a path to elimination by proposing that service in the middle of the route be eliminated and replaced with an 11-hour bus ride. The *Coast Starlight* was spared for the most part during the Mercer era, having been reduced to five frequencies per week for a few months. Fortunately, most of those cuts were reversed in 1997. The tri-weekly *Pioneer* over the Union Pacific between Denver and Portland/Seattle and the *Desert Wind* between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles (also tri-weekly and over the UP) were the casualties at the time, but the other trains were restored to daily operation.

In short, the less-than-daily operations were not successful, as ridership and revenue plummeted.

If Amtrak now cuts service as planned, it is reasonable to expect that at least some riders will refuse to plan their itineraries around the days on which Amtrak is willing to provide a train. Most will use their automobiles, while others will either take an airline (if possible), or just not make the trip. If there is a missed connection (an occurrence that happens more often than it should), it would cost a traveler two or three days, not just one. If the trains become unreliable for potential riders, they will become unpopular with members of Congress, because they had already become unpopular with the members' constituents. That could endanger other Amtrak services,



including the NEC.

The political balance between the Northeastern states and the rest of the country, both Democrats and Republicans who vote to keep **Amtrak** going, could break down. That breakdown could affect the states that pay to support trains or corridors. If the delicate balance that preserves the trains fails, it could be the end of **Amtrak** as we know it. It could severely damage local rail transit in and near several major cities, too.

**It is difficult to discern how Amtrak's attack on the L-D makes sense, under the present circumstances. At this writing, those trains are outperforming the state-supported trains and corridors, and even the NEC, for ridership.**

The **Rail Users' Network (RUN)** is a national advocacy organization that pushes for an improved **Amtrak** and better rail transit (this writer is on RUN's Board). RUN recently issued a Call to Action, encouraging advocates and other riders to contact their members of Congress to oppose the proposed Amtrak cuts. [It can be found on the organization's website](#). As part of that initiative, RUN reported: "Ridership is coming back: Long-distance ticket revenues climbed 71%, from \$6.8 million to \$11.6 million between April and May, operating with approximately the same frequencies, Northeast Corridor billing rose about 60% from \$1.5 million to \$2.4 million, and state-supported trains generated less than a 50% increase, from \$2.3 million in April to \$3.5 million in May. The existing long-distance service provided almost double the May revenue of Corridor and state-supported operations combined." So it appears that, in effect, **Amtrak** has chosen to punish its most loyal riders.

**Amtrak has claimed that it plans to implement the severe service reductions because of the COVID-19 virus, which has reduced Amtrak's revenue, even though the railroad recently received a grant of \$1.02 billion from Congress to help it through the shortfall. A close look at the facts renders Amtrak's excuse questionable, if not worse, as we will explore in the next article of this series. In short, the economics of cutting to less-than-daily operation would ultimately cost Amtrak more money—not less.**



*David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, an independent non-profit organization that advocates for better service on the Morris & Essex (M&E) and Montclair-Boonton rail lines operated by New Jersey Transit, and on connecting transportation. In New Jersey, Alan is a long-*

*time member and/or board member of the NJ Transit Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee and Essex County Transportation Advisory Board. Nationally, he belongs to the Rail Users' Network (RUN). Admitted to the New Jersey and New York Bars in 1981, he is a member of the U.S. Supreme Court Bar and a Registered Patent Attorney specializing in intellectual property and business law. Alan holds a B.S. in Biology from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1970); M.S. in Management Science (M.B.A.) from M.I.T. Sloan School of Management (1971); M.Phil. from Columbia University (1976); and a J.D. from Rutgers Law School (1981).*

## Bullets from the Board

By: **Steve Coxhead**, President, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

**Due to the Worldwide Pandemic this year, the Board of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) has been meeting monthly online for the last few months. The advantage of online meetings is the ease of collaborating without traveling. We will continue to meet like this until further notice. If you wish to attend an upcoming IPRA Board meeting please let us know at [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org), so that we may provide you with instructions for joining the video meeting.**

The Board normally meets on the 4th Thursday of the month, on odd numbered months, with exceptions\*\* being made as necessary. All IPRA members and other interested parties are welcome to attend these meetings. The remaining IPRA Board Meetings for year 2020 are planned for these Thursdays:

- ⇒ August 27, 2020\*\*
- ⇒ September 24, 2020
- ⇒ November 19, 2020\*\*

The highlights from recent IPRA Board Meetings are as follows:

- ◆ **Representatives of IPRA and NIPRA met with INDOT staff in January 2020 to review passenger rail topics**
- ◇ Indiana is investigating non-Amtrak options for the **Hoosier State** corridor, but it is unclear how aggressively those options are being pursued, given the 2020 revenue shortfalls caused by the economic complications of the corona virus pandemic

- ◇ The new INDOT Multi-Modal Director is Ms. Kristen Breyer
- ◇ Ms. Venetta Keefe continues as the Passenger Rail Manager
- ◆ The joint IPRA/NIPRA initiative to ask the State of Indiana to charter a **Passenger Rail Commission** continues. We were unable to have the proposed legislation included in the 2020 legislative Summer study session. However, we are making progress in our effort to have the legislation introduced in the upcoming session of the General Assembly. The purpose of a commission would be to promote and facilitate coordination between advocacy groups, INDOT and other organizations in the effort to improve the state of passenger rail in Indiana.
- ◆ **IPRA member Phil Streby made a presentation about passenger rail to the Hoosier Interfaith Power & Light in Kokomo**
- ◆ **Rail Passengers Kentucky** has requested to be allowed to provide a page covering Kentucky issues in "All Aboard Indiana" and this request has been approved
- ◆ **It was noted that the Rail Passenger Association (RPA) is able to perform an economic study of a rail passenger route for approximately \$10,000. IPRA will investigate ways to have a study of the *Hoosier State* route performed.**
- ◆ There was a discussion concerning inviting members of the **Save the Nickel Plate** organization to be welcomed into IPRA
- ◆ **The Board voted to extend IPRA's membership in the Rail Users Network (RUN) for another year**
- ◆ The Board voted to join the **Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce** (a.k.a. Indy Chamber) in addition to the **Indiana Chamber of Commerce**. We will let IPRA's membership in the **Indiana Chamber** expire on September 1, 2020.
- ◆ **Long time Board member Bill Malcolm (of Indianapolis) retired from the Board at the end of 2019. Ms. Andrea Ditto (of Terre Haute) was elected by the Board to fill the resulting vacancy. There are additional open positions on the Board, and there was a discussion of several potential candidates.**
- ◆ **IPRA and NIPRA (Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association)** are meeting periodically to

strengthen coordination between our two organizations. We are exploring the concept of an *Indiana Passenger Rail Commission*, which would focus the efforts of passenger rail advocates and governmental organizations to hasten the development of modern passenger rail in Indiana. This would not be a new organization, as such, but an umbrella structure to facilitate the coordination of private and public organizations to a common purpose. Read the DRAFT BILL online at: [http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/docs/IPRA\\_NIPRA-Indiana\\_Passenger\\_Rail\\_Commission-DRAFT-20200109.pdf](http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/docs/IPRA_NIPRA-Indiana_Passenger_Rail_Commission-DRAFT-20200109.pdf). Stay tuned for more details!

- ◆ **A subcommittee of the Board (Development) has been formed to address the expansion of our *membership*, as well as the acquisition of significant corporation and/or foundation sponsorship.**
- ◆ Work continues to modernize and update the IPRA *website*. A date will soon be determined to activate a new IPRA website.

It is always useful to maintain the dialogue with your State Senator, State Representative and the Governor's Office concerning the importance of a modern 21st Century passenger rail network in the State of Indiana. Please let us know about your conversations with members of the Indiana General Assembly about improving passenger rail in Indiana by sending IPRA an email message to [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org).

The next IPRA Board meeting will be held at the date and location shown here. All IPRA members are welcome to attend!

What: IPRA Board Meeting

When: Thursday, August 27, 2020 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)

Where: Online. A online meeting invitation will be provided to interested people before the meeting. You may call in on a traditional telephone if you don't have a computer with audio/video capability.

Those planning to attend this board meeting are requested to respond to the meeting announcement so that we may plan adequately. **Please watch your e-mail for more details as this meeting's date approaches.**

**Please don't forget to include the *Cardinal* and other Amtrak services in your travel plans. Heavy ridership is the most important weapon we have in the fight to improve passenger rail service in Indiana.**

## Riding the Rails

By: **Tod K Bassler** Editor – All Aboard Indiana,  
Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

**PUBLIC TRANSIT NEEDS EMERGENCY FUNDING** – The US House and Senate are now negotiating over a COVID relief package. Please support providing public transit agencies with \$32 Billion in emergency funding. Go to the **High Speed Rail Alliance** website at: <https://www.hsrail.org/tell-congress-provide-public-transit-emergency-funding>, confirm your information, review and customize the message, confirm your US Senators & Representative and submit the email letter to them. (This request thanks to the **High Speed Rail Alliance**)

**THE INVEST IN AMERICA ACT** – This has the potential to radically improve the American transportation system. Please support the act and ask your Congress person in Washington, DC to support it. Go to the **Transportation for America** website at: [http://action.smartgrowthamerica.org/p/dia/action4/common/public?action\\_KEY=27078](http://action.smartgrowthamerica.org/p/dia/action4/common/public?action_KEY=27078), confirm your information, review and customize the message, confirm your US Representative and submit the email letter to him/her. (This request thanks to **Transportation for America**)

**INDIANA RAIL SUPPLIER KEEPS DART PROJECT IN TEXAS ON TRACK** – **Steel Dynamics, Inc.** in Columbia City, IN has provided the **Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)** with long pieces of rail for their Silver Line Project. See this July 15, 2020 article online at: <https://www.masstransitmag.com/rail/vehicles/press-release/21146241/dallas-area-rapid-transit-dart-arrival-of-rail-for-darts-silver-line-keeps-project-on-track>. (This news thanks to **Mass Transit Magazine**)

**THE FINAL RUN OF THE HOOSIER STATE ONE YEAR AGO** – It seems like just yesterday when this newsletter's Editor was the last customer to disembark the **Hoosier State** passenger train 850 on June 30, 2019. **Justin Bai** was on that train and created a very good documentary of the trip including interviews of IPRA members. Go online at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-379216970/the-final-run-of-the-hoosier-state>, listen and plan your passenger rail improvement strategy! (This "podcast" thanks to **Justin Bai** & **SOUNDCLOUD**)

**CALTRAIN RAMPES UP CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS** – The [California] Silicon Valley commuter rail service started 2020 on a strong note! . See this short but sweet news online at: [https://www.progressiverailroading.com/c\\_s/news/Caltrain-](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/c_s/news/Caltrain-ramps-up-construction-projects--59423)

[ramps-up-construction-projects--59423](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/c_s/news/Caltrain-ramps-up-construction-projects--59423). (This news thanks to **Progressive Railroading**)

**HEAVY RAINS, HURRICANES AND A PANDEMIC DO NOT SLOW WORK ON ORLANDO EXTENSION** – **Rail Group on Air** presents a very good podcast of the work on the **Virgin Trains USA** (a.k.a. **Brightline**) extension from West Palm Beach to Orlando. Enjoy the listen at: <https://www.rtands.com/track-structure/rail-group-on-air-heavy-rains-hurricanes-and-a-pandemic-does-not-slow-work-on-orlando-extension/>. (This news thanks to **Railway Track & Structures** and **Railway Age** magazines and **International Railway Journal**)

**IT'S TIME FOR AMERICA TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT FIXING THE TRAINS** – On June 23, 2020 the Huffington Post published a very readable article about passenger rail in the USA. It's worth your time to read it here at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coronavirus-trains-travel-climate-change\\_n\\_5ef08f5fc5b627efb3967e23](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coronavirus-trains-travel-climate-change_n_5ef08f5fc5b627efb3967e23). (This news thanks to **Amy Crawford** and the **Huffington Post**)

**SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT INVEST IN HIGH-SPEED RAIL TO BOOST A POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMIC RECOVERY?** – With all this historic change occurring this year, now is as good a time as any to get back on track... literally. Read this thought provoking article online at: <https://www.theurbanist.org/2020/06/16/should-the-government-invest-in-high-speed-rail-to-boost-a-post-pandemic-economic-recovery/>. (This June 16, 2020 article thanks to **Martin Brosnan** at **The Urbanist** and **Jerome Horne** for *Tweeting about it*)

**A WALL STREET TYCOON'S PLAN TO GET AMERICANS OFF THE HIGHWAY AND ON HIS TRAINS** – Private equity billionaire **Wes Edens** is betting **\$9 Billion** that America's transportation future is passenger rail. It is very reassuring when there is serious investment in passenger rail in the USA! Read it online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alanohnsman/2020/06/11/inside-a-wall-street-tycoons-plan-to-get-americans-off-the-highway---and-on-his-trains/>. (This June 11, 2020 article thanks to **Alan Ohnsman** & **Antoine Gara** at **Forbes** magazine)

**FEDERAL RAIL ADMINISTRATION (FRA) HAS WEB PORTAL TO REPORT BLOCKED RAILROAD CROSSINGS** – In December 2019, the FRA activated a portal on the Internet so the general public or law enforcement could report when trains block railroad crossings for an extended period of time (including date, time, location and duration). The FRA is using

this website to gather data and any actions resulting from that data have yet to be determined. See online at: <https://www.fra.dot.gov/blockedcrossings/>. (This information thanks to *L S Walters* and the *FRA*)

#### THE IDEA FOR AN INDIANA PASSENGER RAIL

**COMMISSION IS PROPAGATING** – The January 2020 press release about the IPRA/NIPRA joint proposal for an Indiana Passenger Rail Commission has been published in *Progressive Railroading*. See the article online at: [https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger\\_rail/news/Rail-advocates-back-creation-of-Indiana-Passenger-Rail-Commission--59578](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/news/Rail-advocates-back-creation-of-Indiana-Passenger-Rail-Commission--59578). (This news thanks to *Progressive Railroading*)

**17 RAILROAD PLACES YOU NEED TO VISIT IN THE CENTRAL U.S. OR THE MIDWEST** – This great list will keep you busy planning for getting out of the house this year or next! See the list online at: <https://trn.trains.com/railroads/hotspots/2020/01/17-railroad-places-you-need-to-visit-in-the-central-us-or-midwest> (This information thanks to *Trains* magazine)

#### WHITE HOUSE TWEETS ABOUT SOUTH SHORE

**IMPROVEMENT** – On May 28, 2020, President Trump tweeted "Indiana is set to receive \$100M in US DOT transit funds for the South Shore Line to connect people to jobs around the State and the Chicago-area and help cut down on traffic. Governor Holcomb has worked very hard on this project!" Notice that he says "...around the State..." so this implies that there's more to come! South Shore President Michael Noland was very happy about this recognition.

**HIGH-SPEED LA-to-LAS VEGAS VIRGIN TRAIN WINS \$600 MILLION CALIFORNIA BOND ALLOCATION** – These tax-exempt bonds were approved unanimously in Sacramento and service could be seen in 4 years! Let's make noise for progress like this in the Midwest, specifically Indiana and Ohio! See this article online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alanohnsman/2020/04/14/high-speed-la-to-las-vegas-virgin-train-wins-600-million-california-bond-allocation>. (This April 14, 2020 article thanks to *Alan Ohnsman* at *Forbes* magazine)

**THE SOUTH SHORE LINE MODERNIZES 1927** – About **93 years ago** a video was made showing improvements to the *South Shore Line*. If you know the line well, you should recognize the landscape and which stations are no longer there. Watch this fantastic historic footage on **YouTube** at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scPI8CNNM>. (This "news" thanks to *SparkDalmation* and *YouTube*)

**THE SOUTH SHORE LINE MODERNIZES 2020** – The **Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** has approved the Double Track Project to enter into the Engineering phase! Read the article online at: <https://www.doubletrack-nwi.com/news/news-1/207-northern-indiana-commuter-transportation-district-announces-federal-transit-administration-approval-to-enter-into-engineering-for-the-double-track-northwest-indiana-project>. (This news thanks to the **Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD)**)

**MAYOR MAKES PUSH TO RESTORE NOBLESVILLE TRAIN STATION** – In April 2020, Mayor **Chris Jensen** of Noblesville planned to ask the city council for \$1.5 million to revamp the 10-acre railyard in Forest Park. It formerly was operated by the *Indiana Transportation Museum*, which has been embroiled in disputes with the city and Hamilton County officials for several years. Jensen said it's time to move on and improve the railyard with landscaping, hardscape paths, restroom improvements, historic signs and a covered platform. If you are a subscriber to the IBJ, you can see the article online at: <https://www.ibj.com/articles/climbing-aboard>. (This news thanks to **Kurt Christain** at the *Indianapolis Business Journal*)

**PARKING REFORM FOR 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITIES** – If you're wanting to learn more about bringing urban area back to the PEOPLE, please read this very good article and listen to the Webinar recording online at: <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/webinar-recap-parking-reform-for-21st-century-communities>. (This March 6, 2020 article & webinar thanks to **Tyler Quinn-Smith** at *Smart Growth America*)

**THE CONGESTION CON** – How more lanes and more money equals more traffic. This excellent report discusses what many of us already know... more highway capacity does not solve our transportation density problem. Download the 37-page March 2020 report at: <http://t4america.org/maps-tools/congestion-con/>. (This report thanks to *Transportation for America*)

**BRIGHT FUTURE FOR U.S. HSR** – The March 2020 issue of *Railway Age* Magazine has a very good article about the future of modern passenger rail in the USA. View this issue online (**only** online) at: [https://issuu.com/railwayage/docs/railway\\_age\\_march\\_2020/14](https://issuu.com/railwayage/docs/railway_age_march_2020/14). (This article thanks to *Railway Age* magazine)

**THE NEW FACE OF AMTRAK... BILL FLYNN** – See Amtrak's new President/CEO's Biography online at: <http://>



[www.ndtahq.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/BioFlynn\\_ooo.pdf](http://www.ndtahq.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/BioFlynn_ooo.pdf). (This reference thanks to L.S. Walters)

**INDIANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY COMMITTEE** – On June 11, 2020, a few IPRA members attended the Indiana Chamber **Infrastructure Policy Committee Meeting** online where the Indiana Chamber’s position on various Indiana infrastructure investments are discussed. For mass transit & passenger rail, their position is they support continued investment but not at the expense of other programs. In other words, no “robbing Peter to pay Paul”. Also, the public must support the new investment. In short, it will be impossible in Indiana to fund new mass transit and/or passenger rail initiatives without a new source of funds. This is why grants are so important.

**DON YEHLE ON RPA COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR SOUTH CAROLINA** – Starting this year, IPRA Board Member **Don Yehle**, Bluffton, SC, has been nominated to represent South Carolina on the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) **Council of Representatives**. Congratulations, Don! Don joins Indiana Representatives **Duane Chattin** and **Tod Bassler** on the Council.

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## Discounts

**Amtrak** - The Rail Passengers Association (RPA) members **save 10%** online at [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) if booked three or more days in advance. Select the [**Rail Passengers Association**] discount on Amtrak’s website.

**Rail Passengers Association (RPA)** (a.k.a. **NARP**) members have a benefit... **MemberDeals**. Current RPA members will find details on RPA’s website. **If you’re not an RPA member, this is a great time to join!**

**STUDENTS CAN SAVE ON AMTRAK MIDWEST TRAVEL** – If you’re a traveling student, please go online to <https://media.amtrak.com/2018/05/students-can-save-amtrak-midwest-travel/> and learn how you can save money travelling on Amtrak! The **Hoosier State** is no longer in service but all other Amtrak Midwest trains are available.

**YOUR KIDS GET A 50% DISCOUNT WHEN TRAVELING WITH YOU** – Please go online to <https://www.amtrak.com/children-discounts> and learn how you can save money when travelling with your children on Amtrak!

**Crowne Plaza Union Station** in **Indianapolis**: When booking online and selecting Corporate ID = **6972**, you will receive the Amtrak rate of **18% off Best Flexible rate** for these 4 room types: Standard, Superior / Train Car, Executive King and Suite. You can also call the hotel directly at 317-631-2221 and ask for the **Amtrak rate**.

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## For More Information

All Aboard Indiana is a quarterly publication of the **Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA)**, formerly the Indiana High Speed Rail Association (INHSR).

To learn more about IPRA, please visit on our website:

<https://www.indianahighspeedrail.org>

...or contact us at our mailing address:

Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance  
125 West South Street, # 662  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0662

...or at email address: [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org)

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**Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance**

The Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance is a not for profit organization of concerned citizens, working to bring modern, 21<sup>st</sup> Century passenger rail systems to Indiana. We believe such systems are one of the keys to Indiana's economic success in the new century.

**Goals for Indiana:**

- Improve the Chicago-Indianapolis-Louisville-Cincinnati corridor (The Hoosier State)
- Build the Chicago-Fort Wayne corridor
- Expand the NW Indiana South Shore commuter system
- Develop light rail commuter systems for Central Indiana

Modern transit systems are demanded by the work force now coming of age, and expected by 21<sup>st</sup> Century businesses considering locations for expansion.


**Want more information?**  
Contact us at: [info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org)

## IPRA Membership Form

Membership can be purchased online at:

<https://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/join.html>

You are also welcome to print and mail the following form:

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p><b>Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance</b></p> <p>A one-year membership in the <b>Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance</b> is only <b>\$15</b> (Student/Senior 65+) or <b>\$25</b> (Member)</p> <p>Join or renew at<br/><a href="http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/join.html">http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/join.html</a></p> <p>Please mail check to: <b>Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance</b>, 125 West South Street, Unit 662, Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-0662</p> | <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>City: _____</p> <p>State: _____</p> <p>Zip Code: _____</p> <p>E-mail: _____</p> |
|--|---|