



# PASSENGERS Voice

NOVEMBER 2020 | VOL. 54, NO. 10

## AMERICANS VOTE FOR MORE TRANSIT

### BAY AREA VOTERS STEP IN TO SAVE CALTRAIN

**Measure RR** offered a financial lifeline to Caltrain, which struggling with a sharp decrease in ridership due to the pandemic. It also set the railroad on a firm financial footing in the future by providing predictable, dedicated source of revenue for the operator. While the ballot faced a significant hurdle, with California law requiring a two-thirds vote across the three affected Bay Area counties for the new tax measure to be put in place, with 100 percent of precincts reporting it looks as if the measure has comfortably passed.

"With this victory Caltrain has a bright future as it will now be able to provide congestion relief throughout the corridor by serving tens of thousands of new riders with a vastly improved, modernized rail system. With new electric trains powered by clean energy, more frequent service, and stable and affordable fares, Caltrain will be able to realize its full potential as the backbone of public transit on the Peninsula," said Caltrain Board Chair and San Mateo County Supervisor Dave Pine in a statement. "While the pandemic has temporarily changed how we work and how we commute, our region

will recover and our roads will become crowded again. With funds from Measure RR, Caltrain will continue to be a critical component of our public transit network and will help



sustainably and equitably drive our economic recovery."

### AUSTIN-AREA VOTERS ARE FINALLY ON BOARD FOR A REGIONAL RAIL SYSTEM

After decades of false starts, transit rail is finally coming to Austin after voters overwhelmingly approved **Proposition A**.

Austin voters approved funding for the 21-mile Orange Line light rail, serving 22 stations between

North and South Austin; the 15-mile Blue Line light rail, serving 20 stations and connecting Austin-Bergstrom International Airport to downtown and North Austin; the Green Line, a new commuter rail service that would connect downtown to East Austin's Colony Park; and a downtown transit tunnel that would move light rail operations below street level, increasing speed, on-time performance, and safety.

"These will be changes that will be with us for generation after generation, our kids and our children's children will be looking back and saying this was a really big moment in Austin," said Wade Cooper, chair of the Capital Metro board. "So we ask you to hold us accountable, to be engaged as we go forward and to be proud of what we accomplished."

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**"We need a real, long-term infrastructure bill in the \$1.5+ trillion range. If Congress wants to boost the economy and put America back to work, a major infrastructure bill is a great way to do it."**

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority CEO Phil Washington



# RAIL PASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

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This issue has news through November 13, 2020.

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## PORTLAND-AREA VOTERS REJECT TRANSPORTATION MEASURE

Unfortunately, it wasn't all good news for transportation on Tuesday: a majority of Portland-area voters have declined **Measure 26-218**, the proposed regional transportation measure known as "Get Moving 2020".

The measure may have suffered from its sprawling nature—"Get Moving 2020" was a package of incremental improvements to roads and bridges, sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure with no big ambitious project for the entire region to rally behind. However, the rapidly growing Oregon city will need to find a Plan B quickly to deal with increasing road congestion.

The ballot measures supporters, for their part, are pointing to the jobs that this kind of infrastructure investment creates to win over doubtful residents.

"Transportation investments are a critical source of family-wage jobs and apprenticeship hours for our region. We were proud to stand with our labor partners to support Get Moving 2020 because we know what a difference it would make for thousands of hardworking families in communities across our region," said Nathan Stokes, field representative supervisor for the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 701, who also served on the Transportation Funding Task Force. "Although this was not the outcome we

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## Upcoming Events

Go to [railpassengers.org/events](http://railpassengers.org/events) for more information

Please contact Joe Aiello ([jaiello@narprail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org)) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and on-line) of upcoming events!

## EXCITING NEWS! RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION EARNS COVETED 4-STAR RATING FROM CHARITY NAVIGATOR



**Rail Passengers Association's** strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent charity evaluator.

This is the first time that the Association has earned this top distinction.

Only a quarter of charities rated by Charity Navigator receive a 4-star distinction. **The Rail Passengers Association's Charity Navigator** profile can be found by clicking [here](#).

You can read the press release [here](#).

# VIEW FROM THE HILL: PRESIDENT-ELECT BIDEN (AND HIS TRANSITION TEAM) RAISES EXPECTATIONS FOR AMTRAK'S TRAINS

As President-Elect Joe Biden begins the process of planning his transition, a lot of Americans are wondering what having "Amtrak Joe" in the White House will mean for passenger trains in the U.S.

There remain many question marks over what four years of a Biden Administration could mean for passenger rail. The incoming president will need to address decades of underinvestment and a pandemic that has devastated the global travel sector. There is also the Congress to consider; there will be some turnover in key positions on transportation and budgeting committees due to retirements and term limits (for Republicans at least; Democrats don't impose term limits for committee chairs). There is also the small matter of which party will control the Senate, which will be decided January 5th in a Georgia runoff election for its two senate seats.

All these factors will play key roles in limiting what a Biden Administration will be able to achieve. One thing is clear, however: when President-elect Biden is inaugurated on January 21st, no president will have logged as many miles by rail since the dawn of the jet age. And there has never been a president who understands Amtrak as well as Joe Biden—the good, the bad and the ugly. Biden understands the railroad's unique structure, it's corporate culture, the politics of getting it funded. One of his sons served on the board, and he counts

## *But Plenty of Work Remains for Passenger Advocates*

many past Amtrak executives as close personal friends. For Biden, Amtrak is a family business.

That's no small thing. So much of our job is to educate incoming elected officials on the peculiarities of passenger rail operations in the U.S. A Biden Administration is going to understand the problems faced by the average American passenger on day one. And as an anecdote related by former Amtrak President Tom Downs in Trains News Wire reveals, this understanding extends beyond the Northeast Corridor:

- "People assume that the only thing that Joe Biden cares about is the Northeast Corridor," Downs, Amtrak's president from 1993 to 1997, tells Trains News Wire, recounting a 1994 Metroliner ride he shared with the then-junior Senator from Delaware.
- "'Listen, Tommy. I can count!'" Downs recalls, quoting Biden. "'I need 51 Senators who support funding for Amtrak. And they come from around the rest of the country. If they don't have a dog in the fight, Amtrak can't survive,' he told me." They spent about an hour on the train that evening discussing Amtrak's funding needs at a time when it was under intense budget pressure to cut costs. But the two also met when Biden visited the heavy

maintenance facilities at Wilmington and Bear, Del.

- "'I know Amtrak stops at 542 communities and all of those folks are important to Amtrak,'" Downs says Biden would tell the workers. "But he was also acutely aware of the Northeast Corridor's capital deficit, which at the time was something like \$18 billion. Now it's what — \$34 billion?"

This is an argument Rail Passengers has made over and over again in our battle to prevent Amtrak management from ignoring the needs of National Network passengers. As long as the U.S. Senate exists, you simply can't afford to walk away from long-distance service. It's good to have someone in the White House who understands that investing in the National Network is not only a good thing to do, it's also good politics.

The Biden transition team has also tapped a number of experienced transit professionals to lead his team, including Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority CEO Phil Washington and Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation Polly Trottenberg. These personnel choices make it clear that the incoming Biden Administration has a grander vision for its Department of Transportation than simply building more highway lanes and runways. Washington, the transportation

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The Rail Passengers Association needs supporters like you to help make a difference. Through your partnership we can continue to:

- **Advocate** for passengers of commuter, regional and inter-city rails;
- **Collaborate** with grassroots supporters, annual partners and affiliated state-level passengers' organizations;
- **Educate** tourism bureaus, lawmakers, communities and departments about the importance of rail transportation;
- **Inform commuters**, lawmakers and other rail fans about the latest rail news and happenings that impact them.
- **Because of people like you**, Rail Passengers Association advocates on behalf of a nation of passengers and communities who depend on rail transportation for their livelihood and well-being.



As a small charitable organization, we rely on the generosity of others.

Your support ensures staff has the ability to work closely with constituents, communities across the country and Congressional

leadership to reinforce grassroots efforts and ensure rail passengers voices are heard loud and clear in Washington, DC.

#### There are easy ways to give:

1. Make a donation online by visiting [railpassengers.org/donate](http://railpassengers.org/donate).
2. Call the DC Office at 202-408-8362 for assistance in making a donation via credit card.
3. Recommend a grant from your donor advised fund to the Rail Passengers Association.
4. Ask your Human Resources Department about matching your membership dues or recent donation

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sought, we are committed to continuing to work with community, business and public partners, who recognize the value of transportation investments and the living-wage jobs they create."

#### GEORGIA'S GWINNETT COUNTY TRANSIT REFERENDUM STILL UNDECIDED

Finally, ballots are still being counted in Georgia. While all the attention is on the state's Electoral College votes, the transit referendum that would connect Gwinnett County to MARTA also remains in

the balance.

"My biggest concern right now is the transit vote," **newly elected County Commissioner Nicole Love Hendrickson told reporters**. "If that fails, then that is now going to be the (Board of Commissioners') challenge to start focusing on Day One: How do we start to build out a comprehensive transportation plan that connects us to the region? We were really depending on that (referendum passing) to really help move us forward with mobility, connectivity, to help us manage our growth."

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND NOTICES

- Check out the new **Frequently Asked Questions** page on our website to help answer popular questions about your membership.
- **Production and mailing of the printed version of the Passengers Voice newsletter has temporarily ceased. The Passengers Voice will still be available at [www.railpassengers.org](http://www.railpassengers.org) and as a downloadable PDF. For those of you who have paid extra to receive a mailed copy of the newsletter, we will extend your subscription by the number of months we are interrupted.**
- While the Rail Passengers staff is working remotely, we are unable to print permanent membership cards, dues/donation acknowledgment letters, or membership/benefits information. Luckily, you can find information about your Rail Passengers membership by visiting [www.railpassengers.org](http://www.railpassengers.org) and selecting "My Account" to log in or create an account with us.

# LIGHT RAIL ON THE ISLANDS



***Rail Passengers Immediate Past Chair Peter LeCody was in Hawaii earlier this month and had a chance to examine progress being made in the state's first venture into passenger rail.***

(Photos by: Peter LeCody)

Project Director Robert J. Beadle looks regularly at the countdown clock on his office wall as the weeks, days and hours countdown to the launch of Hawaii's first passenger rail line, expected in Spring 2021. A 10 mile starter line, about half the length of the elevated rail system, is expected to start revenue service from the West side of Oahu at Kapolei to Aloha Stadium, where express buses will connect riders to the main business district downtown and the Waikiki entertainment strip.

Built and to be run by Hitachi Rail and overseen by Honolulu Authority Rapid Transportation (HART), the fully-automated and driverless rail line, the first of its kind in any U.S. state, is under the microscope of the Federal Transit Administration. The rail system is similar in many aspects to the Vancouver, Canada driverless SkyTrain, according to Beadle.

Test trains are now running on the first ten mile segment as tweaks and adjustments are made. The entire

dual track 750 volt third-rail system is to be elevated, except for a short stretch near the HART Operations Center in Waipahu and the Leeward Community College rail station.

The 20 4-car Hitachi Rail trains are manufactured in Italy, assembled in California and shipped by sea to Honolulu where final work is performed, according to HART Director of Communications Bill Brennan. A good number of the train sets are on the island and undergoing tests.

The brightly colored HART trains have open gangways between all cars, making it very spacious inside. The interior color scheme blends the Hawaiian spirit of sky, sun, sea and land with light blue strap-hangers for the sky, safety grab poles with luggage and surfboard racks in yellow for the sun, deep blue seats for the sea and a speckled beige floor for the land and beaches. Each train



will seat 188 and can handle standees with an average train accommodation of 634 riders. Yes, there will be free wifi onboard.

During peak times HART expects to run five minute headways between the 21 stations, eleven minutes between trains in off-peak. By 2030 HART expects there

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## JOIN RAIL PASSENGERS



# RAIL PASSENGERS

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If you're reading the Passengers Voice and are a current member, **THANK YOU** for your support. Rail Passengers invites you to share our membership information with your family, friends, colleagues, etc.

If you're reading the Passengers Voice and are NOT a current member, we invite you to join.

Visit [railpassengers.org/all-aboard/join](https://railpassengers.org/all-aboard/join) or call 202-408-6382 to join!

## #RAIL PASSENGERS TRAVEL REVIEW

Feedback on your recent Amtrak travel experience is very important to us! Please take a moment and tell us the good & the bad of your journey. Share your thoughts at [railpassengers.org/travelreview](https://railpassengers.org/travelreview) or scan the QR code from your mobile device.



Remember, the progression of the data we collect depends upon the feedback you provide as well as your outreach to other rail passengers. Please help us to keep this going. If you have any constructive feedback or suggestion, please send an email to [TravelReview@narprail.org](mailto:TravelReview@narprail.org).

## LEAVE A LEGACY

Please consider the Rail Passengers Association in your will. If you have already included us in your estate plans, let Jonsie Stone know at [jstone@narprail.org](mailto:jstone@narprail.org) or 202.408.8362 Ext. 3207. We'd like to

thank you for your generosity and make sure the purpose of your gift is understood.



## QUESTION...

**DID YOU VOTE TO SUPPORT PASSENGER RAIL INITIATIVES IN YOUR AREA?**

**A. Yes! Gladly!**

**B. No, We didn't have any.**

Click here to submit your answer to this poll on social media at <https://www.facebook.com/narprail>, or send in your response via email to: [survey@narprail.org](mailto:survey@narprail.org).

## RAIL PASSENGERS MEMBERS SHARE THOUGHTS, POLL RESULTS

Each month we conduct polls on social media and in our newsletters to spark conversation and provide another outlet for you to share your thoughts on rail.

Due to Facebook's recent format change, pages are no longer allowed to post polls.

We are working on a new way to bring you this content. Stay tuned for more!

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Name:** Warren Yee  
**Location:** Seattle, WA

## What does RPA

**mean to you?:** I'm an active member of RPA because it advocates for our preferred mode of travel, but also because of the economic boost

passenger rail gives to many rural communities, the cars it takes off the road when operating between major urban areas, and the mobility it gives to those who cannot drive or choose not to drive.

I was introduced to rail travel in 1992 and finally took my first overnight trip in 1996 cross county via the Pioneer/Three Rivers (Seattle to Philadelphia). Both the late Hans Mueller, late Jim Hamre introduced me to RPA (then NARP). I am also involved in my state's rail advocacy group, All Aboard WA.



RPA is the organization that keeps advocating for passenger rail service on a national level.

As a traveler who use Amtrak a few times per year—for trips up and down the Amtrak Cascades Corridor and occasionally an overnight trip in a sleeper on a long haul train (usually on the Coast Starlight or Empire Builder) I do recognize that my travel modes and options would be vastly different without the work of RPA and its dedicated staff and membership.

Though Amtrak has made some foolish and shortsighted cutbacks recently, it seems that more elected officials' attitude towards passenger rail has changed and there is more bipartisan support for Amtrak. Much of this new support is due overwhelmingly to the efforts of RPA. Hopefully when COVID-19 subsides, and the economy starts to improve, RPA has the organization, connections, and people to push for the restoration of daily service, new corridors, and new equipment.

The **"Member Spotlight"** is a monthly section where we highlight the Association's most important asset: YOU. To be considered, email Madi Butler at [mbutler@narprail.org](mailto:mbutler@narprail.org).

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will be 120,000 passenger trips each weekday. HART trains will be integrated with the island's 'The Bus' transportation network.

The stations, each with a distinctive Hawaiian name, have high-level platforms with barrier gates that will open when train doors are ready to accept or discharge passengers, similar to some airports. The build out continues past Aloha Stadium and The Daniel Inouye International Airport in Honolulu but the final four miles into the business district, the contract yet to be let, appears to challenge both construction and political minds.

The elevated piers may require deeper structural support. Political support requires a

finalized Public-Private Partnership contract to be submitted to the FTA before the end of 2020 or HART could be in jeopardy of losing \$250 million in funding. Political tussles are not unusual for rail projects, even in Honolulu. Rail Passengers Hawaii Representative Jim Loomis reminded me that the City Council rejected rail by one vote in the 80's and again with a vote to kill the project in 1992.

If you've ever suffered through snail-paced Honolulu traffic or driven on the H-1 (Hawaii Interstate) you probably would have thrown up your hands and prayed for a rail line, someday, any day. One that would whisk you from West Oahu to downtown in only 42 minutes when completed. That day is now very close.



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**HILL**, from p. 3

lead, wouldn't comment directly on the President-elect's plans for rail and transit—but he demonstrated a clear understanding of the pressing needs faced by these systems, and the scale of relief needed to ensure their continued operations.

"We need a real, long-term infrastructure bill in the \$1.5+ trillion range. If Congress wants to boost the economy and put America back to work, a major infrastructure bill is a great way to do it," Washington told reporters. "In the meantime, we are working in good faith with the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation to ensure that any future COVID-19 relief bill includes sufficient funds to help our agency deal with the dramatic shortfall in sales tax revenue."

It seems clear that these experienced professionals will

be ready to start executing a plan on day one. That's why Rail Passengers is committed to continuing our work with the Biden transition team through January, transmitting our policy proposals and a short list of passenger rail projects that are ready to move quickly and worthy of funding. Stay tuned for more information as the Biden Administration continues to build out its transportation team.



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