Update on Labor Day Travel on Page 11

Growth Spurt:

THE OUTLOOK FOR CHICAGO'S INTERCITY RAIL TRAFFIC THROUGH 2030

Chaddick Policy Brief | August 28, 2025

By Joseph P. Schwieterman

Chicago's intercity travel system is performing strongly, but capacity constraints loom:

- The Chicago Hub is outperforming other U.S. regions in traffic growth this year, fueled by rising Amtrak demand, the new *Borealis* service, and past station and track investments.
- Traffic on state-supported trains will grow by an estimated 10% over the next two years, spurred by increases in demand and several new trains, pushing traffic above pre-pandemic levels.
- Capacity shortages are prevalent on key routes. We expect slower growth from 2028 to 2030 due to peak-period shortages of seats and the likely absence of significant service additions.
- Sold-out trains create pressure for state governments to acquire additional coaches, launch supplemental bus services, and pursue other strategies to leverage recent corridor upgrades.

Metropolitan Chicago's role as a major transportation hub is crucial for the region's commercial, convention, educational, and cultural activities. This brief, prepared independently and using publicly available data, examines potential changes in intercity rail passenger traffic through 2030 and provides recommendations to maximize the mode's regional potential. With a short-term focus, it does not evaluate the long-term promise of emerging technologies, high-speed rail, or other factors.

We summarize our three primary findings, followed by recommendations for state, local, and regional entities on the following pages. Our analysis of Labor Day Weekend appears on page 11.

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PHOTO (ABOVE): *An Amtrak Chicago – Carbondale train near Homewood, IL, 2024*

RESEARCH TEAM*: Zaria Bonds and Samantha Rouzan*
All photos by Chaddick Institute

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FINDINGS FROM OUR ANALYSIS

This analysis is based on the following research activities:

- An evaluation of Amtrak data from its Monthly Performance Reports through June 2025. These results are more recent than published 2024 fiscal-year statistics.
- Comparing seven state-supported trains in the Chicago Hub with those in the other regions.
- Consultations with stakeholders and consultants in the bus and rail sectors.
- Traffic forecasts by federal agencies and the U.S. Travel Association (USTA).

A Midwest map Amtrak prepared with the launch of the Borealis *service. State-supported routes are shown in blue, with long-distance routes in orange.*

FINDINGS

Finding 1: A significant upswing in Amtrak passenger traffic, sustained by financial support from five state governments, is underway. Driven by strong demand for regional travel, ongoing improvements to Chicago Union Station, and the introduction of the new Twin Cities train, the Hub is outperforming peer regions.

The Midwestern passenger-train network, centered on Chicago Union Station (CUS) and made possible by extensive state government support, is experiencing impressive traffic growth.[1] During the first nine months of Amtrak's fiscal year ending in June 2025, ridership on state-supported Amtrak trains to CUS rose by 8% compared to the same nine-month period the previous year, despite ongoing equipment shortages that limit seat capacity.

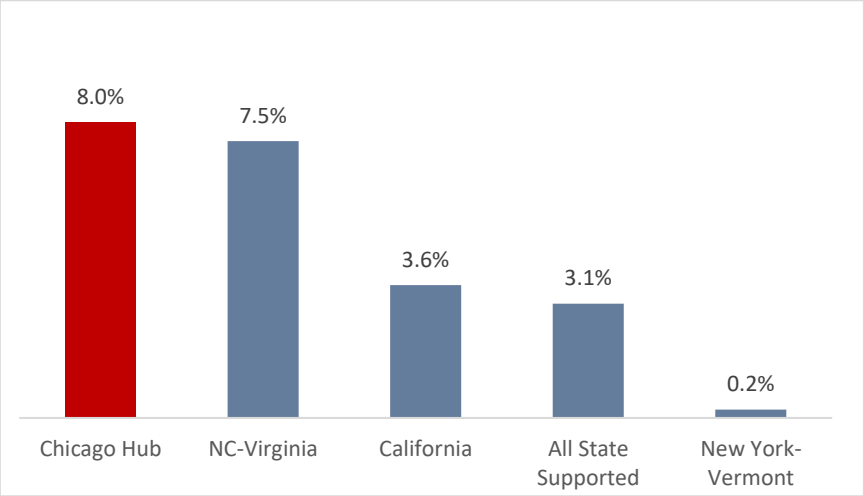
The system is operated with financial support from state transportation departments in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and other states. It further relies on the Midwest Interstate Rail Passenger Commission's (MIRPC's) technical support, which has been crucial in planning and securing funding for the Chicago Hub. We summarize MIRPC's work in the endnotes, which includes supporting the Chicago Hub Improvement Program (CHIP), a far-reaching initiative with several significant projects underway.[2]

Amtrak announced $300 million in grants with its partners last October, aiming to double ridership at the Chicago Hub by 2040. This effort is supported by the federal Corridor ID program, which accelerates planning for service expansion (click here for Midwest routes[3]). Amtrak's national traffic reached a new record in its fiscal year 2024, with ridership increasing by 14.8%.

Travelers have responded favorably to Amtrak's May 2024 introduction of the *Borealis* (a second Chicago–St Paul train) and the gradual rollout of 110-mile-per-hour service on the St. Louis line. The *Borealis* ended a lull in prominent new train-service rollouts at CUS. New Venture passenger coaches, manufactured by Siemens, have been introduced.

Additionally, relatively new stations in Alton, Carlinville, Champaign, Dwight, Joliet, Lincoln, and Pontiac, as well as in other communities in nearby states, are helping to accommodate the traffic gains. Amtrak, having largely overcome many of the worker shortages it experienced in the early post-pandemic years, is now generally operating a full schedule, which is helping fuel the traffic growth.

FIGURE 1: Ridership on Chicago Hub Trains, Fiscal Year to Date
Nine months ending in June '25 vs. same period the previous year| State-supported services only



Chicago Hub's ridership growth rate exceeded peer regions' and the national average. Even when excluding the Borealis/Hiawatha *service, the Hub's growth averaged 4.1%, above all but NC–VA.*

We compared the Chicago Hub with three other state-supported route clusters: California, Upstate New York–Vermont (NY–VT), and North Carolina–Virginia (NC–VA), which offer a helpful comparison (see the chart in Appendix A). Each of these four agglomerations has five or more state-supported routes, except for California, which has three primarily centered on large metropolitan areas with populations exceeding five million. Each also mainly lies outside the Northeast Corridor, which operates differently from the rest of the system. All involve travel distances comparable to the Chicago Hub.

The Chicago Hub is the traffic-growth leader, with an 8.0% increase during the first nine months of Amtrak's fiscal year, from October to June, followed by the NC–VA network, which achieved a 7.5% gain. California and NY–VT grew 3.6% and 0.2%, respectively. NY–VT results were affected by construction in metropolitan New York, which resulted in temporary schedules on the Empire Corridor. Traffic on state-supported trains serving Chicago increased from 1.71 million, averaging approximately 190,000 per month, during the same period last year, to 1.85 million, or 206,000 per month. The Chicago Hub remained second only to California in traffic. This performance reflects the favorable developments mentioned above and Chicago's continued appeal for tourism and personal travel. This growth occurred despite the number of seat-miles on the

The Amtrak Alton (IL) Station is a busy place, with the northbound Texas Eagle's *arrival in April 2025. This train and other long-distance runs are excluded from this study's traffic analysis*

Hub's seven routes growing by just 1.0%, the lowest among the regions (see comparison in the endnotes).[4] California and NC-VA both rose by more than 4%

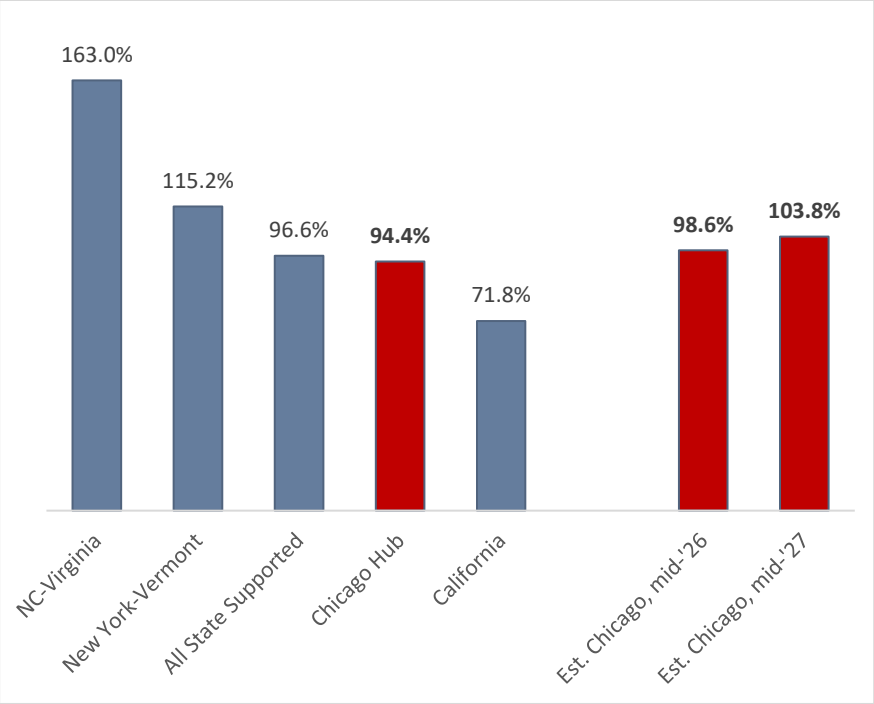
The Chicago Hub's ridership through June 2025 was 94.4% of the same period in 2019, placing it below the rates of the NC–VA and NY–VT regions but well ahead of California's 71.8%. (The hub's

The consistency of growth in the Chicago Hub is noteworthy. The Chicago Hub is the only region without a route that incurred a traffic loss, despite having the most routes among peer regions. Each of the seven routes saw passenger gains of 2.7% or more, surpassing Illinois's 1.1% real GDP growth in 2024 (Appendix B).

Four of the seven routes experienced growth exceeding the national rate for all state-supported routes (3.1%).[5] Chicago's strength is broad-based and not limited to routes to particular states. Even when the *Borealis* and related Hiawatha service is excluded, passenger growth averaged 4.1%, well above that of every other region except NC–VA.

FIGURE 2: Ridership vs 2019 Fiscal Year Levels With Forecast for Mid-2026 and 2027

Nine months ending in June '25 vs. same period in 2019| State-supported services only



Chicago Hub ridership was 94.4% of 2019 levels, modestly trailing the U.S. average for state-supported service. We anticipate it will reach 103.3% by July 2027.

The growth in passenger miles of travel was 13.8%, far above all the others, due to the long travel distances of *Borealis* passengers (238 miles). The next closest was NC–VA's 5.9% rate. We offer more details in the endnotes.[6]

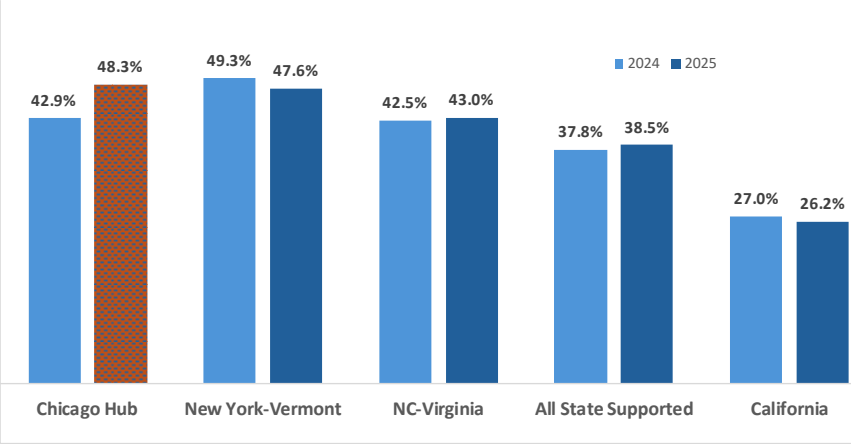
Finding 2: Chicago Hub ridership is on pace to return to 2019 levels by late 2026. We project a cumulative 10% increase over the next two years, facilitated by the addition of several trains. Growth will continue despite worsening capacity shortfalls on existing trains.

ridership has reached 95.3% of 2019 if the now-discontinued *Hoosier State* route is excluded.[7]) California is an outlier due to its reduced seat-miles of service on two of its three routes.[8] The Chicago Hub, conversely, has returned mainly to running a full schedule.

NC–VA and NY–VT's ridership has hit 163.0% and 115.2% of 2019, respectively, fueled by service expansion more extensively than in Chicago. New trains have boosted NC-VA's seat-miles by substantially more than at the Chicago Hub. NY–VT's strength since 2019 reflects growth on the Empire Corridor, which extends from New York to

Niagara Falls (via Albany and Buffalo), and significant gains on the *Ethan Allen Express*, a train originating in New York that extended to Burlington, VT, in 2022. These regions are also investing more heavily in Amtrak Thruway bus connections than in the Midwest.

FIGURE 3: Rising Load Factors Across Regions and the U.S.
Nine months through June '25 vs. same period through June '24| State-supported services only



Chicago Hub has recorded the highest load factor during the first nine months of FY 2025, at 48.3%, among peer regions.

Due to the consistency of the Chicago Hub's gains since 2023, the strength of this summer's traffic, and several new trains on the way, we project that it will grow by 10% over the next 24 months through August 2027. This growth will be fueled by a new twice-daily service to Rockford, IL, which will be operated by Metra, the region's commuter rail provider, and is projected to start in 2026. (The route's length, around 90 miles, makes it an intercity route by our definition, although Metra's standard bi-level suburban coaches may be used for this service.)

An additional Chicago–Milwaukee round-trip, facilitated by ongoing trackwork in Wisconsin, is expected to launch in 2026 or 2027. This will result in up to nine trains in each direction, including the *Borealis*, which took the slot of a Chicago–Milwaukee train. We expect growth to be greater in the second year of the two-year period, primarily due to the introduction of these trains, which will increase daily train departures from CUS by around 15%. We anticipate that this will push ridership to 103.8% of 2019 levels by August 2027.

Growth in seat-miles and train-miles is likely to be lower due to the new trains' shorter routes.[9] We expect passenger miles of travel to grow by around 7% over the next two years.

The Chicago Hub's ridership growth is on track to well outpace the USTA's 2.5-2.6% projected growth for U.S. auto travel through 2027. By late next year, we anticipate that traffic will consistently surpass 2019 levels.

When long-distance routes (which we do not consider in our review) are included, we expect intercity rail traffic at CUS to be around 3.34 million in calendar year 2027, up from around 2.72 million during Amtrak's FY 2023.[10] The increase will complement efforts to bring additional vitality to Chicago's Loop District.

Finding 3: Growth is expected to slow considerably between 2028 and 2030 due to the need for additional coaches and the probable lack of significant new service additions by state governments. These factors will likely limit the Chicago Hub's ability to meet rising demand and fully leverage previous investments, particularly CUS improvements and 110-mph service to Detroit and St. Louis, through 2030.

State governments in the Midwest deserve credit for acquiring new Venture coaches for regional routes. Their number, however, is proving

insufficient. This problem, combined with the expected absence of new intercity offerings during the 2028–2030 period, will create natural headwinds for traffic growth.[11] This lull is despite Illinois passing comprehensive legislation in 2019 that authorized $500 million for both Rockford and the Quad Cities service. The latter has faced many roadblocks (partially due to the need to install a signaling system) and isn't expected to start for years. There are also no announced plans for frequency additions on the routes to D etroit and St. Louis, both of which are now equipped for 110-mph running. We expect the traffic gains to be only incremental during the 2028–2030 period.

The result will likely be more intensive seat utilization, reflected in increasing load factors (defined as passenger miles of travel divided by seat-miles of service provided). This will result in more trains selling out or being priced at premium levels to deal with shortages.

Load factors on regional rail routes tend to be below 50%, except in instances where there are relatively equally sized traffic generators at both ends (which is not the case on Chicago Hub routes due to the enormous size of metropolitan Chicago). This reflects the tendency for trains to fill up when approaching major hubs and then progressively become emptier in the opposite direction as travelers detrain. This is evident, for example, on the Carbondale, IL – Chicago route, which is apt to reach capacity as trains near Chicago, particularly north of Champaign. Another factor keeping load factors relatively low is that rail operators tend to offer a roughly equal number of seats in both peak and off-peak times for operational convenience and safety regulations related to uncoupling cars.

Load factors above 40% often indicate capacity shortages for these reasons, as determined by our review. In the Chicago Hub, however, load factors surged from 43% to 48% during the recent eight-month period compared to the previous year (Figure 3). This was the largest jump of any region, resulting in the highest load factor, which was

A Chicago – Saint Louis train with Siemens Venture coaches (right) at Alton in late 2022.

slightly above that of NY–VT (47%) and considerably higher than those of California (23%) and NC–VA (32%). This number is also well above the national average for state-supported routes (38%). The Chicago Hub routes with the highest load factors are the St. Louis (52%) and Detroit (57%) routes, which have major traffic generators at both ends.

These high load factors indicate that additional capacity is required. The analysis provided in Appendix B suggests that this may be partially due to the limited seat capacity per average train operated, which is lower in the Chicago Hub than in other regions. Our review also found that trains are regularly sold out at peak times, as evident in the approaching Labor Day Holiday (see table on page 11).

Sustaining traffic growth in the Chicago Hub will require a substantial effort to expand capacity and introduce new services. The three peer regions have more ambitious expansion projects underway that are expected to boost traffic by 2030.

- In the NC–VA region, a new twice-daily Christiansburg, VA – Washington, DC service running 250+ miles is expected to launch by 2027. North Carolina plans to

open the first part of the "S Line" route around 2030. Upon completion, the S-Line will provide enhanced Washington–Richmond–Raleigh service. It involves rebuilding a partially abandoned segment.

- In the NY–VT region, it is anticipated that new Airo trainsets, similar to Siemens Venture cars, some of which will have 430 seats, will enter service in 2029–2030, allowing for a significant expansion of seat capacity.
- In California, a high-speed line from Las Vegas to metropolitan Los Angeles, Brightline West, which is backed by private funds, is projected to start operations in 2028–2029 (construction delays could occur). California's San Francisco–Los Angeles high-speed route's potential completion is beyond the present study's time horizon.

The opportunities for large-scale expansions to the Chicago Hub are more favorable after 2030, thanks to the sustained support by MIRPC, state governments, and Amtrak for corridor and station improvements. Advocacy organizations, including the High Speed Rail Alliance and the Environmental Law & Policy Center, have also raised awareness of the opportunities. Moreover, Amtrak is receiving new rolling stock in other regions that could allow some older equipment to be freed up for Midwest service.

A Peoria Charter coach, pictured above at Chicago O'Hare's Multi-Modal Facility in 2024, operates a complementary service to Amtrak at Bloomington-Normal, IL.

Recommendations

The outlook for traffic growth at the Chicago Hub is strong but constrained by available capacity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was unclear whether Chicago would see rail traffic return to 2019 levels within a decade or more. Yet, crossing that threshold is now imminent. Several actions can be taken to strengthen the hub despite limited state budgets and the complexity of service expansion.

1: State governments should redouble their efforts to facilitate capacity expansion on existing trains. This should include adding coaches on a relatively ambitious timetable. Although Wisconsin's capacity will expand once it receives nine new Venture cars, reportedly to arrive in 2026, other states should place orders, joining the queue for new coach deliveries.[12] If Amtrak's Horizon cars are brought back into service and new Aero trainsets free up Amfleet cars in other regions, states should push for a significant number of these coaches to be allocated to the Chicago Hub.

2: State and regional agencies should pursue new approaches to cultivate the next stage of the Chicago Hub's development. The Hub is one of the region's core economic strengths and is particularly vital to the Loop District. These entities should adopt a more "hands-on" approach that includes the following:

- Launch state-government initiatives to promote travel on trains where substantial capacity exists, drawing upon the strategies used by California, North Carolina, and New England states. This can include fare promotions, joint

marketing with special events, and special trains. Social media, newsletters, and websites (such as those for the Oregon Cascades and Capital Corridor, which offer examples) have not been utilized to their full potential, particularly in Illinois and Michigan.[13]

- **Develop programs to expand synergy with public transit, both in Chicago and downstate.** These programs could include arrangements for Amtrak tickets to be accepted on a specific connecting Metra service. California's *Rail-2-Rail* and Joint Ticketing program, which allows tickets to be used on both Amtrak and transit services, may not be exactly replicable here, but it is illustrative of the possibilities.

- **Establish the goal of enhancing the Chicago Hub** as a key consideration in comprehensive transit funding and reform initiatives. This goal should be part of the anticipated creation of the Northern Illinois Transportation Authority. It would strengthen Illinois's capabilities for developing an integrated expansion plan.

- **3: Policymakers should leverage the potential of supplemental intercity bus service** in coordination with Amtrak trains to expand the schedule options on routes where frequency or capacity will be limited.

  Such strategies could include following the lead of Oregon, Washington, and Vermont, which extensively supplement their train services with motorcoach offerings. Buses are listed alongside trains on Amtrak.com. It should also include filling gaps on routes with limited schedule offerings, such as those to Champaign, IL, Indianapolis, and Grand Rapids, MI.

A related strategy is to follow the lead of California, New York, and Washington state, which have large Amtrak Thruway bus networks serving places not reached by train. This strategy is particularly underutilized in Illinois and Minnesota and is only lightly used in several other nearby states. To achieve this, policymakers should specifically do the following:

- **Connect underserved markets**, such as Bay City-Midland, MI, Decatur and Jacksonville, IL, Duluth and Rochester, MN, Evansville, IN, and the Quad Cities.
- **Improve existing connections**, such as service to Peoria, IL, and points north of Grand Rapids, MI, in which transfers can involve several hours of waiting time.

4. State agencies should establish priorities to avoid elongating the timeline of service expansions. Although technical factors may prevent service expansion to Columbus, OH, Green Bay, WI, the Quad Cities, IL, central Iowa, and other points before the end of 2030, it is important to avoid stretching out the timelines further than necessary.

Such efforts will build, sustain, and expand the impressive momentum underway in the Chicago Hub.

This brief has been prepared as an extension of the Chaddick Institute's mission to promote public understanding of the evolution of transportation systems. The findings are based entirely on the Chaddick Institute's independent analysis of publicly available data, without proprietary Amtrak data or perspective. Any opinions expressed are those of the authors.

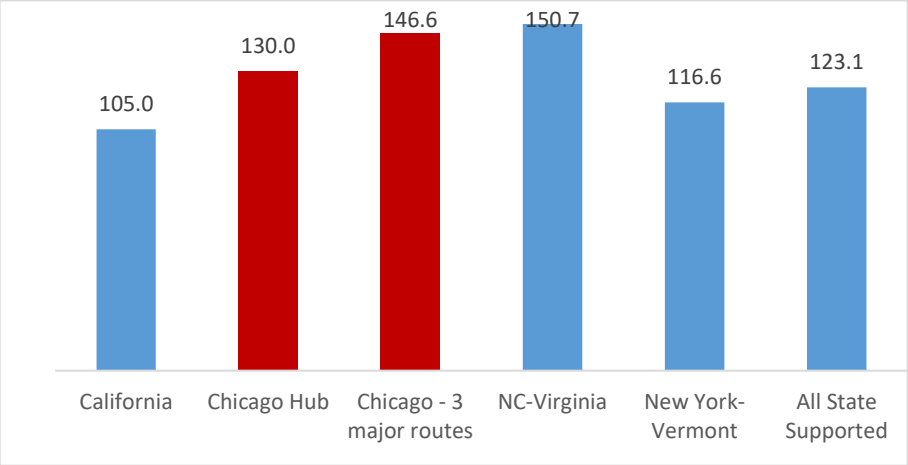
Appendix A: Traffic Performance of the Chicago Hub vs. Other Regions | State-Supported Routes Only

First Nine Months of Fiscal Year Results, October – June

	Ridership (passengers)					Avg. Trip (Miles)	Seat Miles		Load Factor		Passenger Miles		
	2019	2024	2025	Chg. 24-25	% of. 2019	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	Chg. 24-25
Chicago Hub													
Chicago- St. Louis	461.8	427.6	439.1	2.7%	95.1%	201.6	174.7	172.4	49.3%	51.8%	86.2	89.3	3.6%
Hiawatha & Borealis	642.8	521.8	612.5	17.4%	95.3%	87.2	109.4	134.5	41.6%	55.2%	45.5	74.3	63.3%
Wolverines	364.8	312.8	323.5	3.4%	88.7%	219.3	133.5	128	51.4%	55.6%	68.6	71.2	3.8%
Illini	198.9	219.4	239.1	9.0%	120.2%	157.7	119.8	109.6	28.9%	34.6%	34.6	37.9	9.5%
Illinois Zephyr	142.4	104.2	106.9	2.6%	75.1%	164.1	50.4	50.4	33.9%	33.9%	17.1	17.1	0.0%
Blue Water	131.7	123.8	128.8	4.0%	97.8%	190.6	59.4	59.2	39.7%	41.9%	23.6	24.8	5.1%
Pere Marquette	70.1	67.1	68.9	2.7%	98.3%	152.0	19.4	19.3	52.6%	54.4%	10.2	10.5	2.9%
Hoosier State	20.9												
Total	2033.4	1776.7	1918.8	**8.0%**	94.4%	**160.9**	666.6	673.4	42.9%	**48.3%**	285.8	325.1	**13.8%**
North Carolina/Virginia													
Wash - Lynchburg/Roanoke	162.9	247.7	274.4	10.8%	168.4%	135.6	91.6	97.2	36.7%	38.3%	33.6	37.2	10.7%
Wash - Newport News	245.2	273.6	296.3	8.3%	120.8%	117.3	76.9	82.6	41.7%	41.9%	32.1	34.6	7.8%
Washington - Norfolk	150.6	374.8	410.5	9.5%	272.6%	130.7	149.9	161.9	32.7%	33.0%	49	53.4	9.0%
Washington -Richmond	100.2	109.4	113.9	4.1%	113.7%	85.0	27.6	31.2	33.7%	31.4%	9.3	9.8	5.4%
Carolinian	193.4	258.6	249.4	-3.6%	129.0%	222.7	91.7	82.9	62.8%	66.3%	57.6	55	-4.5%
Piedmont	162.6	274.9	309.8	12.7%	190.5%	116.0	64.4	69.7	49.5%	51.6%	31.9	36	12.9%
Total	1014.9	1539	1654.3	**7.5%**	163.0%	**138.7**	502.1	525.5	42.5%	**43.0%**	213.5	226	**5.9%**
California													
Pacific Surfliner	1983.5	1399.4	1447.6	3.4%	73.0%	94.5	468.7	510.4	28.2%	26.8%	132.2	136.7	3.4%
Capitols	1326.3	772.5	831.6	7.7%	62.7%	74.4	197.9	201.7	29.1%	30.1%	57.5	60.8	5.7%
San Joaquins	802.7	680.4	675.6	-0.7%	84.2%	144.3	401.1	410.8	24.5%	23.5%	98.2	96.4	-1.8%
Total	4112.5	2852.3	2954.8	**3.6%**	71.8%	**100.9**	1067.7	1122.9	27.0%	**26.2%**	287.9	293.9	**2.1%**
New York/Vermont													
Empire Service	899.8	1001.5	1022.6	2.1%	113.6%	166.0	259.4	259.4	64.1%	64.5%	166.2	167.3	0.7%
Maple Leaf	277.5	361.6	339.9	-6.0%	122.5%	194.4	176.8	173.6	39.8%	36.7%	70.3	63.7	-9.4%
Vermonter	71.9	82.3	87.6	6.4%	121.8%	103.3	38	39.6	22.4%	23.5%	8.5	9.3	9.4%
Adirondack	79.3	57.2	59	3.1%	74.4%	173.1	27.5	35.8	36.0%	27.9%	9.9	10	1.0%
Ethan Allen Express	34.9	64.4	61.5	-4.5%	176.2%	96.3	27.9	30.3	22.2%	20.8%	6.2	6.3	1.6%
Total	1363.4	1567	1570.6	**0.2%**	115.2%	**166.6**	529.6	538.7	49.3%	**47.6%**	261.1	256.6	**-1.7%**
Other/Totals													
Cascades	582.4	639.7	696.6	**8.9%**	119.6%	151.6	200.3	192.2	48.4%	**53.5%**	97	102.9	**6.1%**
All State Supported	11294.3	10581.3	10909	**3.1%**	96.6%	**126.5**	3541.3	3610.1	37.8%	**38.5%**	1338.2	1,391.2	**4.0%**
All Amtrak	23931.1	24115.2	25522.7	5.8%	106.7%	198.4	9164.6	9728.8	52.2%	52.5%	4784.9	5,109.9	6.8%

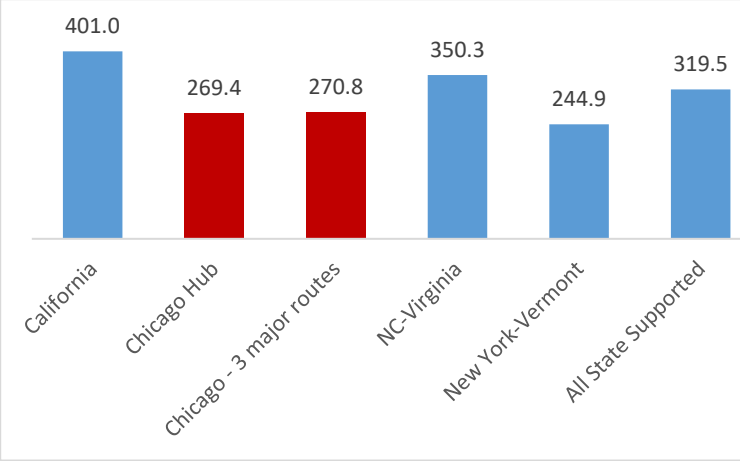
Appendix B: Growth in Seat-Miles to the Chicago Hub Routes vs. Other Regions, State-Supported Routes Only

Average Number of Passengers Per Train Mile (Calculated as Passengers Per Train Mile / Train Mile)



The average number of passengers per train mile at the Chicago Hub (130.0) is well above the national average for state-supported trains (123.1) and near the midpoint of peer regions. The Hub's three-route scenario (146.6) includes only the Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee/Saint Paul routes. The maximum count on the average train rises sharply when trains are close to Chicago. These results should be regarded as an approximation due to rounding in Amtrak reports.

Average Seats Per Train Mile



The Chicago Hub's average number of seats per departure (269.4), possibly due to equipment shortages, is below the national average and that of its peer regions. The three-route scenario encompasses routes to Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee/Saint Paul, which has a capacity close to the Chicago Hub average. These results should be regarded as an approximation due to rounding in Amtrak reports

Appendix C: Labor Day's Sold-Out (SO) Trains and Capacity-Induced Fare Increases

This table shows the increasing prevalence of trains being listed as sold out (S0) on the days leading up to the Labor Day Holiday in 2025. The bold red font indicates the day we first observed its sold-out status. We also display fares in red when one-way coach fares exceed $100 or business-class fares exceed $135, which is well above normal prices and appears to be due to capacity constraints. This table is current as of 3 p.m. on Wednesday, August 27, several days before Labor Day Weekend. Many more trains will likely hit capacity before departure. Sold-out trains that were sold out for an extended period but then became available again, in some cases through the holiday period, are shown with an asterisk (*).

Route	Depart	*Thursday, August 28*		Depart	*Friday, August 29*		Depart	*Saturday, August 30*		Depart	*Monday, September 1*	
	Time	**Coach**	**Business**	Time	**Coach**	**Business**	Time	**Coach**	**Business**	Time	**Coach**	**Business**
Chicago -St. Louis	7:15AM	$36	$65 - $94	7:15AM	$51 - $62	$94 - $107	7:15AM	$51 - $62	$94 - $107	7:15AM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago -St. Louis	9:50AM	$43 - $51	**SO Thursday**	9:50AM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Monday**	9:50AM	$89	$119	9:50AM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago -St. Louis	1:52PM	$62 - $93	N/A	1:52PM	$74 - $89	N/A	1:52PM	**SO Monday***	N/A	1:52PM	**SO Wednesday***	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago -St. Louis	5:20PM	$51	$82 - $107	5:20PM	$62 - $74	$94 - $107	5:20PM	$51	$82	5:20PM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago -St. Louis	7:10PM	$36 - $43	$73 - $82	7:10PM	$51 - $62	$82 - $94	7:10PM	$51	$82	7:10PM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
St. Louis - Chicago	4:30AM	**SO Tuesday**	**SO Tuesday**	4:30AM	**SO Tuesday***	**SO Monday**	4:30AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	4:30AM	$36	$65
St. Louis - Chicago	6:35AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	6:35AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	6:35AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	6:35AM	$51	$107
St. Louis - Chicago	8:10AM	**SO Monday**	N/A	8:10AM	**SO Monday**	N/A	8:10AM	**SO Tuesday**	N/A	8:10AM	$74 - $89	N/A
St. Louis - Chicago	2:55PM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	2:55PM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	2:55PM	$62 - $74	$92 - $107	2:55PM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Wednesday**
St. Louis - Chicago	5:40PM	**SO Monday***	**SO Monday**	5:40PM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	5:40PM	$36	$65	5:40PM	$62	$94
Chicago - Detroit	2:15PM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Monday**	6:45AM	$76 - $113	$150	6:45AM	$76 - $113	$117 - $150	6:45AM	$113	$150
Chicago - Detroit	5:50PM	**SO Thursday**	$117 - $150	2:15PM	$93 - $113	**SO Tuesday***	2:15PM	**SO Thursday**	$135 - $150	2:15PM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago - Detroit				5:50PM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Wednesday**	5:50PM	$44 - $76	$102 - $117	5:50PM	$113	**SO Wednesday**
Detroit - Chicago	6:26AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	6:26AM	**SO Tuesday***	**SO Thursday**	6:26AM	**SO Wednesday**	$102 - $150	6:26AM	$76	$117
Detroit - Chicago	6:11PM	**SO Tuesday***	**SO Tuesday**	9:35AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	9:35AM	$76 - $113	**SO Tuesday**	9:35AM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday***
Detroit - Chicago				6:11PM	**SO Thursday**	$135 - $150	6:11PM	$40 - $52	$78 - $91	6:11PM	**SO Thursday**	$135 - $150
Chicago - Carbondale	8:15AM	$39	$59 - $68	8:15AM	$57 - $84	**SO Monday**	8:15AM	$57	$93 - $122	8:15AM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago - Carbondale	4:05PM	$39 - $57	**SO Tuesday***	4:05PM	$57 - $84	$93 - $122	4:05PM	$47 - $57	$79 - $122	4:05PM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago - Carbondale	8:05PM	$70 - $102	N/A	8:05PM	$57 - $70	N/A	8:05PM	$47	N/A	8:05PM	**SO Wednesday**	N/A
Carbondale - Chicago	3:16AM	$57	N/A	3:16AM	**SO Monday**	N/A	3:16AM	**SO Wednesday***	N/A	3:16AM	$57	N/A
Carbondale - Chicago	7:30AM	$57 - $70	**SO Monday**	7:30AM	**SO Wednesday***	**SO Monday**	7:30AM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	7:30AM	$57 - $70	$93
Carbondale - Chicago	4:15PM	**SO Thursday**	**SO Thursday**	4:15PM	**SO Monday**	**SO Monday**	4:15PM	$39	$59 - $93	4:15PM	$47 - $57	$68 - $79
Chicago - Grand Rapids	6:30PM	**SO Wednesday***	**SO Tuesday***	6:30PM	$61 - $71	$91	6:30PM	$61	$85	6:30PM	$70	$91
Grand Rapids - Chicago	6:00AM	$53 - $61	$85 - $91	6:00AM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Tuesday**	6:00AM	$45 - $61	$85 - $91	6:00AM	$61 - $70	$85 - $91
Chicago - St. Paul	11:10AM	$77 - $145	N/A	11:10AM	**SO Monday**	N/A	11:10AM	**SO Tuesday**	N/A	11:10AM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Chicago - St. Paul	3:05PM	$117 - $145	N/A	3:05PM	$145 - $179	N/A	3:05pm	$145 - $179	N/A	3:05pm	$179	N/A
St. Paul - Chicago	8:50AM	**SO Monday***	N/A	8:50AM	**SO Wednesday**	N/A	8:50AM	**SO Thursday**	N/A	8:50AM	$117	N/A
St. Paul - Chicago	11:34AM	**SO Thursday**	N/A	11:34AM	$95 - $145	N/A	11:34AM	$62 - $77	N/A	11:34AM	$145	N/A
Chicago - Port Huron, MI	4:00PM	$31 - $57	**SO Thursday**	4:00PM	$57 - $84	$120 - $134	4:00PM	$57	$90 - $104	4:00PM	**SO Wednesday**	**SO Wednesday**
Port Huron, MI - Chicago	6:20AM	$38	**SO Tuesday***	6:20AM	**SO Tuesday***	**SO Wednesday***	6:20AM	$69 - $103	**SO Monday**	6:20AM	$103	$134

The first day we observed this train appearing as "sold out" (SO). For this train, it was Tuesday, August 26

Fares shown in red indicate when one-way coach fares surpassed $100 or business class fares surpassed $135, apparently due to capacity constraints. On this train, coach class fares reached $103. The ranges shown in other cells indicate the evolution of ticket prices during the sample period,

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ENDNOTES

[1] The current arrangements for state-supported Amtrak service is the result of the **Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act (PRIIA)** of 2008, which is describe in this Mineta Transportation Institute case study.

[2] The **Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission** (MIPRC) brings together state leaders from across the region on a bipartisan basis to work towards developing and implementing a 21st-century passenger rail system.. MIPRC's current members are Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, while several other states are eligible to join. The compact works to promote, coordinate, and support regional improvements to passenger rail service. In 2021, MIPRC and FRA released the Midwest Regional Rail Plan, a new "high level" vision for what intercity passenger rail could look like in the Midwest within 40 years. The Plan envisions a robust network of multiple frequencies linking major cities and smaller towns, which capitalizes on the benefits of a multistate system. In 2024, MIPRC was awarded up to $1.84 million through the FRA's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements Program. The regional planning grant will begin the work of expanding, refining, and prioritizing corridor development.

[3] For a map and details on the **New Corridor ID Development** program, please click here. Forecasts of traffic growth after 2030 could be heavily shaped by the initiatives spurred by this program.

[4] The change in **seat-miles** was lower in the Chicago Hub (1.0%) than in California (17.6%), NC-Virginia (4.7%), New York-Vermont (1.7%) and all state-supported routes (6.2%). We did not include **the Pacific Northwest's Cascade** service or New England's Downeaster in our analysis because they are reported as a single corridor, whereas the other regions have three or more corridors.

[5] We combined the Hiawatha and *Borealis* services because they both operate between Chicago and Milwaukee. The *Borealis* replaced a Hiawatha train upon its 2024 launch. We did not include the Kansas City – Saint Louis ("Missouri River Runner") route because not all trains operated between Chicago and Saint Louis.

[6] The change in **revenue-passenger-miles** was much higher in the Chicago Hub (13.8%) than in California (2.1%), NC-VA (5.9%), NY-VT (1.1%), and all state-supported corridors (4.0%). The heavy traffic and long travel distance on the Borealis were significant factors.

[7] We tabulated the growth both with and without the *Hoosier State*, a Chicago–Indianapolis train that operated three times weekly before its last run in June 2019. The train is included in our calculations. Excluding it had only a modest effect on traffic levels versus 2019 (there was less than a 0.3 percentage point difference).

[8] Only recently did **California** expand its Pacific Surfliner service to levels comparable to those in 2019, although it still operates with one of the few trains in each direction.

[9] The three new trains, including the two Metra trains to Rockford, will increase daily supported-supported departures from around 20 to 23, a 15% increase. Their average distance, around 90 miles, however, is considerably below the Hub average of around 170 miles. Some of the Rockford traffic will be suburban rather than intercity in orientation.

[10] This is a conservative estimate that does not distinguish between intercity passengers originating and terminating at CUS and those making connections. It is based on increasing the FY 2023 estimate of CUS traffic, 2,722,448 passengers, published here by 23.5%, an increase projected from an estimated 5% growth during FY 2024, 7% growth through summer in FY 2025, and our forecasted 10% traffic growth for the next two years. This includes the Metra service to Rockford. This is an independent estimate by Chaddick.

[11] State governments, including the State of Wisconsin, are exploring options to add a second state-supported Chicago-St. Paul train. Due to the likely need to make track and right-of-way investments to support this train, we do not regard it as probable by 2030. However, having it start by this date remains possible.

[12] For a discussion of Wisconsin's acquisition of nine Venture coaches, refer to this news article.

[13] Examples of noteworthy promotional websites maintained by state governments include this Oregon Cascades and California Capital Corridor site. V7