

Introduction

Northeast Corridor

New York State

New England

Florida

East-Midwest

Gulf Coast

Illinois/Missouri

Indiana

Michigan

Wisconsin/Minnesota

Texas

Midwest-West

Pacific Coast

Appendix



ABOVE One-of-a-kind paint scheme applied to ex-Penn Central E8A No. 4316 for Amtrak's May 1, 1971, debut. JIM BOYD; KEVIN EIDALY COLLECTION

MIDDLE An emerging corridor: Amtrak *San Joaquin* Train 708 calls at Stockton, Calif., in May 1986. FRANK FERGUSON; KEVIN EIDALY COLLECTION

FAIR RIGHT Under decade-old catenary that extended the Northeast Corridor electrification to Boston, HHP-8 No. 661 arrives at New Haven, Conn., with a New York-bound train in July 2011. GEORGE FLETCHER



Dedication

First and foremost, this book is dedicated to the countless Amtrak employees we met, and didn't meet, during our collective 30 years with the company. To them, Amtrak was a cause. It was their dedicated service that allowed it to thrive. Among the employees, in particular, without the support and friendship of John Baesch and Edward Lombardi, Dave would likely not have had his Amtrak career. Bruce considers the time he spent in Amtrak's Route Marketing Department as the best years of his transportation career. The department, under Director of Route Marketing Ira Silverman, was a dynamic place to work and the catalyst for so many programs and Amtrak product improvements in the 1980s and '90s. Although the group has not been together since 1995, the team members remain nothing short of a family, with many enduring friendships among the members of the group.

While he was never an Amtrak employee, this book is also dedicated to Ross Capon, who worked tirelessly and unselfishly on Amtrak's behalf. Ross was the long-time head of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (now the Rail Passengers Association), constantly promoting intercity rail service. His efforts on Capitol Hill were often a pivotal contribution to Amtrak's success in surviving when its continued existence looked severely threatened. Without Ross' efforts, we think it is doubtful that there would have been 50 years of Amtrak trains about which to write.

Introduction and Acknowledgements

At 12:05 a.m. on Saturday morning, May 1, 1971, a new era in American passenger railroad history began when Train 235 departed Pennsylvania Station, New York, en route to Philadelphia. The previous night it was a Penn Central passenger train, but now it was the first train belonging to a new entity known as the National Railroad Passenger Corp.—Amtrak. As Amtrak's first day of operation began, nobody was sure what the Amtrak era would bring, or how long it would last.

The Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970, which was signed into law by President Nixon on October 30, 1970, and established Amtrak, said the company's role was to operate a system of passenger rail routes as designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation. But, depending upon one's personal, political, or philosophical view, it was less than that. Or more than that. Some saw it simply as bailing out the freight railroads from having to run their money-losing passenger trains. Many assumed that if the trains did not achieve profitability during the initial two-year authorization, the intercity passenger trains and Amtrak would be allowed to die. Others saw Amtrak as nothing less than a way to save the nation's passenger trains and ensure their continued existence.

Despite initial doubts about its prospects for long-term success, and 50 years of continuing debates over the exact role that Amtrak should serve, the company has survived frequent political threats and the impact of uncertain and often insufficient federal assistance.

A half-century later, Amtrak has carved out a niche in the United States' transportation system, its trains continue to roll across a nationwide network, and the company will introduce a new generation of high-speed trains for the Northeast Corridor. As Amtrak began its 51st year of service, it faced its most severe threat ever. Not an exceptionally hostile Congress or Administration, but a microscopic coronavirus that spawned the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Travel literally shut down in most countries around the globe, including the U.S. More than 95% of Amtrak ridership was lost in just two months, many trains were temporarily discontinued, and long-distance frequencies were reduced. As this book went to press in late 2021, Amtrak was still recovering, but the changes made in response to the pandemic have had a greater impact on the service Amtrak operates than any single event in the company's history.

Would all trains "temporarily" discontinued before the pandemic be restored, and/or would the reduced-frequency long-distance trains be restored to daily operation? Amtrak's history had shown that nobody knew for sure, but there was encouraging news on both fronts in mid-2021. Over the intervening half century since May 1, 1971, the debate over what Amtrak should be has been the subject of books, countless news articles and reports, analysis, and policy debates. We'll leave the debate to others, and concentrate instead on the trains that Amtrak actually operated.