

Testimony Before the Vermont Senate Transportation Committee

115 State Street, Room 3, Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

March 11, 2026 at 9:00am

Chair Westman, Vice Chair White, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Margaret Clark, and I serve as the Manager of Amtrak's State and Local Government Affairs team for the Northeast.

On behalf of Amtrak, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the State of Vermont for your longstanding support of intercity passenger rail and for the essential role Vermont plays in strengthening mobility and economic opportunity throughout the region.

Amtrak's Record-Setting Fiscal Year 2025

Amtrak has just completed the strongest year in our 53-year history. FY25 marked the second consecutive year of all-time records in ridership, revenue, and system performance. Nationally, we carried 34.5 million passengers, a 5.1 percent increase over FY24, the highest ridership Amtrak has ever recorded. Adjusted ticket revenue reached \$2.7 billion, up 10.4 percent year over year, and total operating revenue grew to \$3.9 billion, an increase of 9.1 percent. Passenger-miles traveled rose to 6.9 billion, demonstrating the growing national preference for reliable and attractive alternative transportation options. We also saw notable improvements in on-time performance, particularly along the Northeast Corridor.

These accomplishments occurred despite the challenges posed by an aging national fleet and persistent systemwide capacity constraints. In FY25, Amtrak increased system capacity by 4.3 percent, an important contributor to revenue growth, customer satisfaction, and our ability to meet demand.

This record-breaking year underscores the strong public appetite for passenger rail and the importance of continued federal-state partnerships, including our longstanding collaboration with Vermont on the *Vermont* and *Ethan Allen Express*.

What This Momentum Means for Vermont

Vermont continues to be a standout performer within Amtrak's state-supported network. The same trends we are seeing nationally, rising demand, strong tourism-driven ridership, and increased interest in regional mobility, are clearly evident across Vermont's routes.

Amtrak's national success strengthens the viability of service improvements that Vermont has long championed: better frequencies, more reliable travel times, and modern rolling stock built to meet contemporary expectations for comfort, accessibility, and convenience.

Airo Trains: A New Standard for the Passenger Experience

Beginning this fall, Amtrak will introduce Airo trainsets on the *Amtrak Cascades* route in the Pacific Northwest, our next-generation fleet designed to transform the customer experience on state-supported corridors. Vermont can expect delivery of these new trainsets around 2030.

Our initial order includes 83 trainsets; however, given the rapid growth in ridership nationwide, we anticipate the need for additional orders in the coming years.

I also want to extend our sincere gratitude to the Committee for supporting Amtrak's National Railroad Partnership Program grant application to order more Airo trains and upgrade our facilities to accommodate the new trains. We enthusiastically submitted our application on February 5. Vermont was the only state to have all members of the transportation committee sign a letter of support! Once again, demonstrating the incredible partnership Amtrak and Vermont possess. We expect to hear from the Federal Railroad Administration in mid- to late summer, and we will keep you fully informed as soon as results are available.

Key Benefits of the Airo Fleet

Modern, energy-efficient, hybrid-capable equipment

- Quieter operation
- Reduced emissions

Greater capacity and accessibility

- Increased seating and more flexible configurations
- ADA-compliant restrooms and vestibules
- Low-floor boarding at compliant platforms

Enhanced customer amenities

- Panoramic windows, At-seat power and refreshed modern interiors
- Upgraded onboard Wi-Fi
- Next-generation café service

These improvements will directly address the capacity pressures we saw across the national network in FY25, where sellouts were often driven by limited coach availability. The Airo fleet is designed specifically for state-supported services, the same category that

includes Vermont's routes, and will replace aging *Amfleet I* equipment to provide greater consistency and reliability for Vermont riders.

Showcase Event: First Look at the Airo Fleet

On February 10, Amtrak hosted a first-look showcase of the Airo trainsets in Washington for members of Congress and State DOT leaders. The event was filled with genuine excitement and pride. Attendees were struck by how significant the upgrades are, especially features such as the refillable water bottle dispenser and the remarkably spacious restrooms, which surprised many who toured the equipment. The reaction at this event underscored a simple truth: when riders experience meaningful improvements, they respond enthusiastically.

Conclusion

Vermont has long embraced passenger rail as a driver of economic development, tourism, and alternative transportation. With Amtrak's record-setting FY25 performance and the forthcoming introduction of the Airo fleet, Vermont is well-positioned to benefit from a safer, more modern, more reliable, and more customer-centered rail network that supports the state's commitment to strong transportation options.

Amtrak deeply values our partnership with the State of Vermont, and we look forward to continued collaboration with the Vermont Legislature.

Thank you for your time. I would be pleased to answer any questions.