

How cost-effective will another Amtrak run be?

Introduction: Beginning November 18, 2026, Amtrak will add another daily train on the *Pennsylvanian* service which runs from Pittsburgh through Philadelphia and on to New York City. Amtrak also offers the *Keystone* rail service from Harrisburg through Philadelphia to New York with several trains each day. The *Pennsylvanian* takes 5-plus hours and passes through seven stations by traveling from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg. Continuing the trip to Philadelphia adds another 2 1/2 hours passing through five more stations for a total of 7 1/2 hours between Pennsylvania's largest cities. Going further to New York adds two more stops in New Jersey along the way.

The recent announcement of another *Pennsylvanian* train per day was predicated on Norfolk Southern's (the owners of the tracks) demands for certain corridor improvements which ended up costing taxpayers about \$220 million, of which \$143.6 million was covered by a federal grant received in 2023 (at the behest of then-Pennsylvania's U.S. senators) and the rest by commonwealth taxpayers.

All this in addition to the subsidy Amtrak already receives annually to maintain rail passenger service.

In 2024, there were a total of 136,800 passengers boarding or disembarking (B&D) at the train station in downtown Pittsburgh (data from the U.S. [Bureau of Transportation Statistics](#)). Of that number 91,746 boarded or alighted from a *Pennsylvanian* train. The other roughly 45,000 were passengers boarding or getting off a *Floridian* train. The *Floridian* service replaced the *Capitol Limited*, with its service west to Chicago and east and south down to Miami.

In 2025, Pittsburgh's station saw a rise in B&D passengers to a recent high of 141,146, which is still below the 10-year-ago 2015 count of 149,587. While official data for passengers on the *Pennsylvanian* are not yet available, a reasonable estimate based on its 2024 share of total puts the 2025 count for the service at 94,600. Assuming a further modest 3 percent rise in 2026, the *Pennsylvanian* passenger count at 97,500 and the total number of passengers at the Pittsburgh station at roughly 145,530.

On a daily average basis, 97,500 annual passengers would mean 267 boarding and disembarking at Pittsburgh per day. The Amtrak passenger coaches in service have a capacity of 72 passengers. Amtrak trains typically have five cars with a total seating capacity of 360. Assuming roughly half of the 267 per day are getting on board, that puts the daily outbound passenger count at roughly 134. That would amount to well less than half (38 percent) of the train's capacity.

Of course, additional passengers will likely be picked up on the way east at several stops on the way to Harrisburg and further to Philadelphia and New York to boost daily passengers served by the *Pennsylvanian* to 646.6 (eastbound and westbound) or an annual total of 236,000 in 2025.

Here's the obvious question in light of the foregoing discussion: Is the addition of a daily service from Pittsburgh warranted by demand and how long will it take to reap the economic benefits to justify the \$220 million spent to make the needed improvements on the railroad as required by Norfolk Southern as a condition for the second running of the *Pennsylvanian*? And, most importantly, how many future passengers that would have used the existing service will choose to travel on the new line, thereby splitting up passengers between the two?

Indeed, where is the forecast of ridership on the second *Pennsylvanian* train from Pittsburgh across the commonwealth? And how much economic benefit is there per person riding the train as opposed to riding in automobiles? It certainly is not a substitute for people who fly in light of the time it takes to get to Philadelphia or New York from Pittsburgh by train.

Further, what are the societal or potential environmental benefits? Are there available studies that address those issues? Taxpayers who will be paying for the "needed" improvements, and the subsidy to Amtrak necessary to operate the second train—especially if the passenger demand is far below levels to cover operating costs of a second train—deserve to know the details.

While a second train sounds good, there ought to be substantial publicly announced research to show prospective ridership over and above the numbers on the existing service and the expenditures necessary to prepare for and operate a second *Pennsylvanian*.

Build it and they will come is not the basis of sound public policy.

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