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Non-Federal Actors Leading the Way on Regional and Intercity Passenger Rail Development



Commuter Rail Coalition

Speakers

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The Future of Caltrain

Commuter Rail Coalition
Passenger Rail Law Workshop
December 11, 2026



Introduction

Caltrain Corridor

- 77 miles of track from end to end
- 51 electrified miles San Francisco to San Jose
- 3 counties; 20 Jurisdictions; 31 stations
- Tenant railroads: UP, ACE, CC, Amtrak
- 104 trains per day
- Bi-directional commute



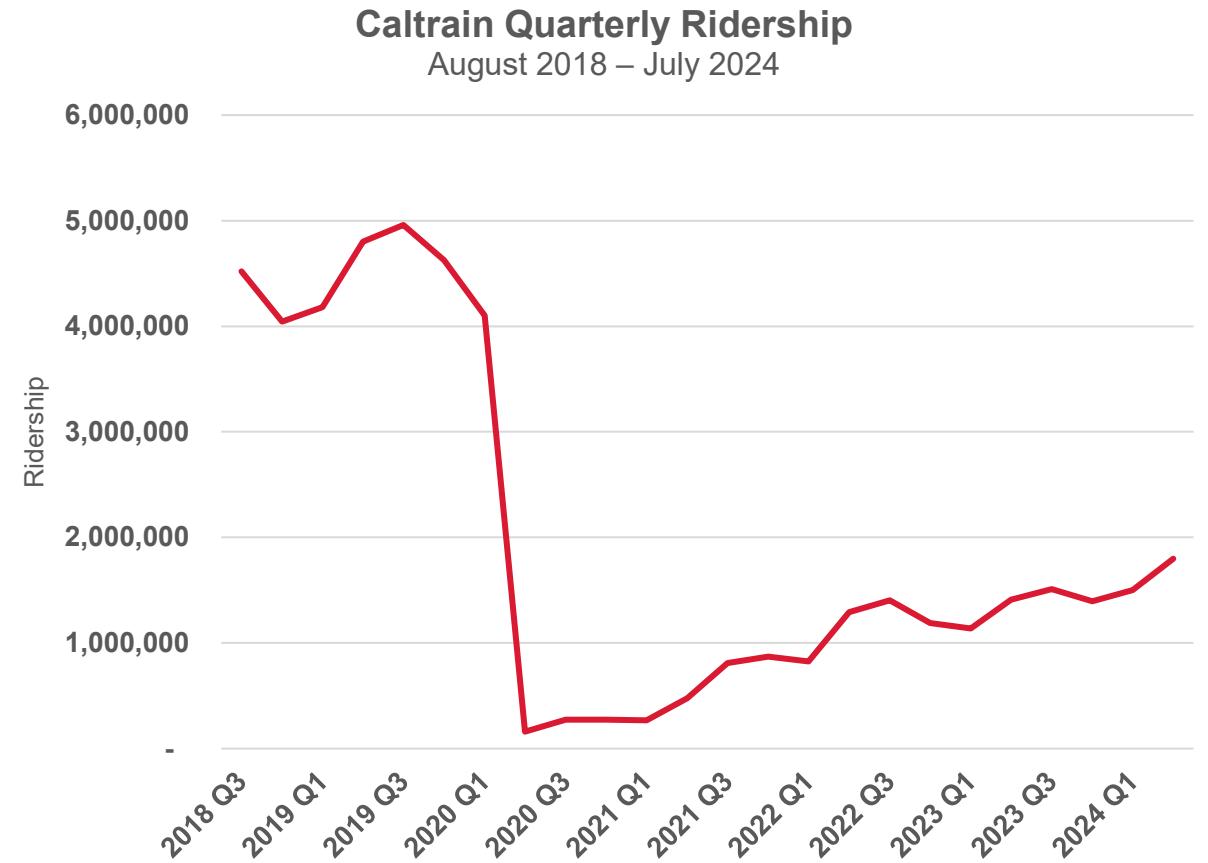
Pre-Electrification

Pre-pandemic

- 7th largest commuter rail in the country in 2019
- 70% farebox recovery
- Over 18 million Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT) in 2019
- Frequently overcrowded trains, standing room only

Post-Pandemic

- Ridership dropped to 3% in March 2020
- Caltrain significantly affected due heavy commuter ridership
- Service initially cut then increased to most daily trains ever (104) in 2022



Caltrain Electrification





Electrification Launched 1 Year Ago

Over 15,000 RSVPs; Events in Every City Along the Corridor

Electrification Benefits

- Faster: Local & Express (60 mins San Francisco – San Jose)
- More Frequent: Service every 30 minutes 7 days a week, with additional express service during rush hour (every 15-20 minutes)
- Doubled weekend frequency to half-hourly service
- Better Experience: Free wi-fi, outlets at every seat, bathrooms, digital displays, quieter inside and outside the trains
- Reliable: On-Time Performance over 95%



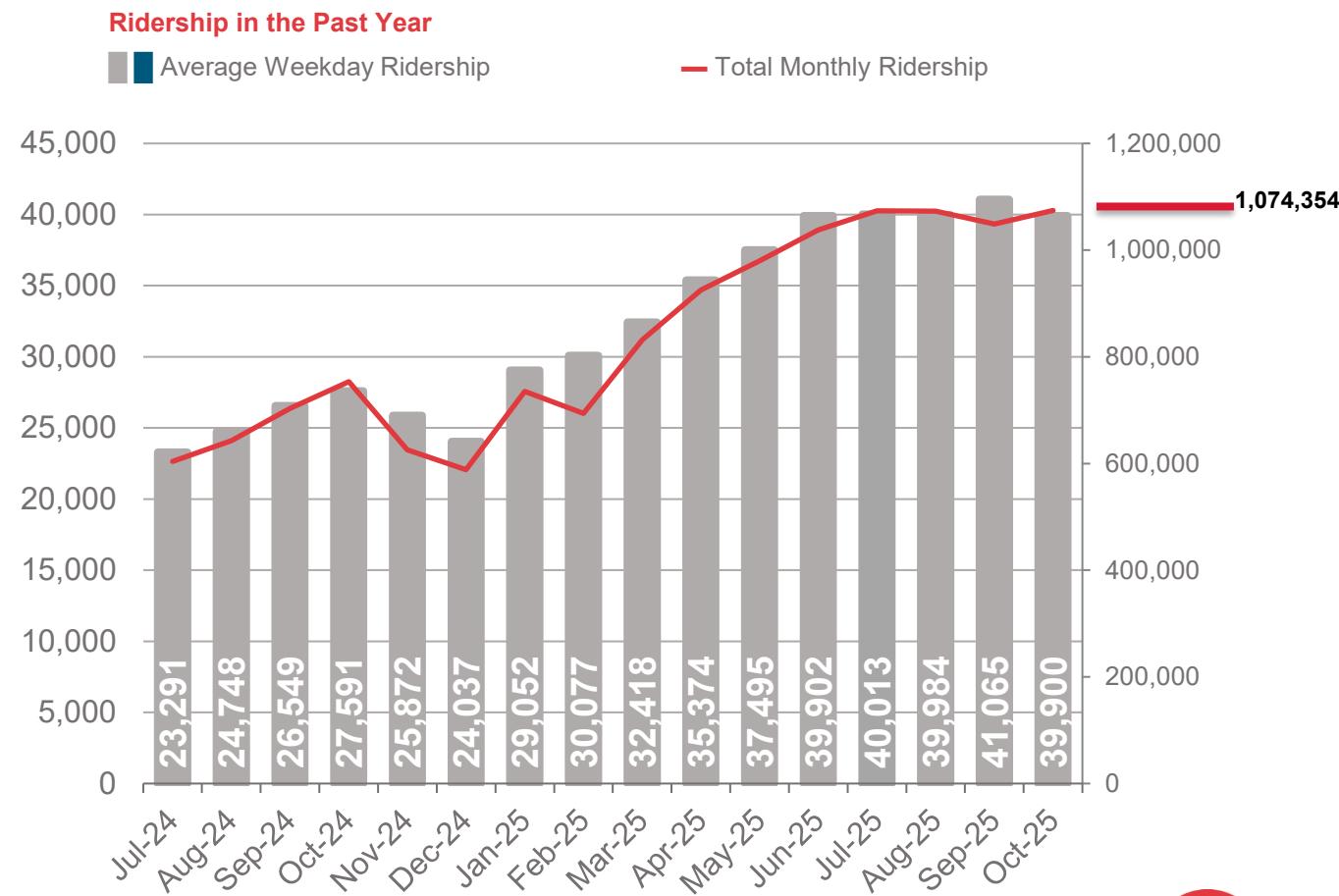
Post Electrification Ridership Growth

Month of August 2025

- Over 1 million riders
- Monthly +69% vs July 2024
- Weekday +61% vs July 2024
- Weekend +115% vs July 2024

Compared to 2019

- 63% (56% weekday, 162% weekend)



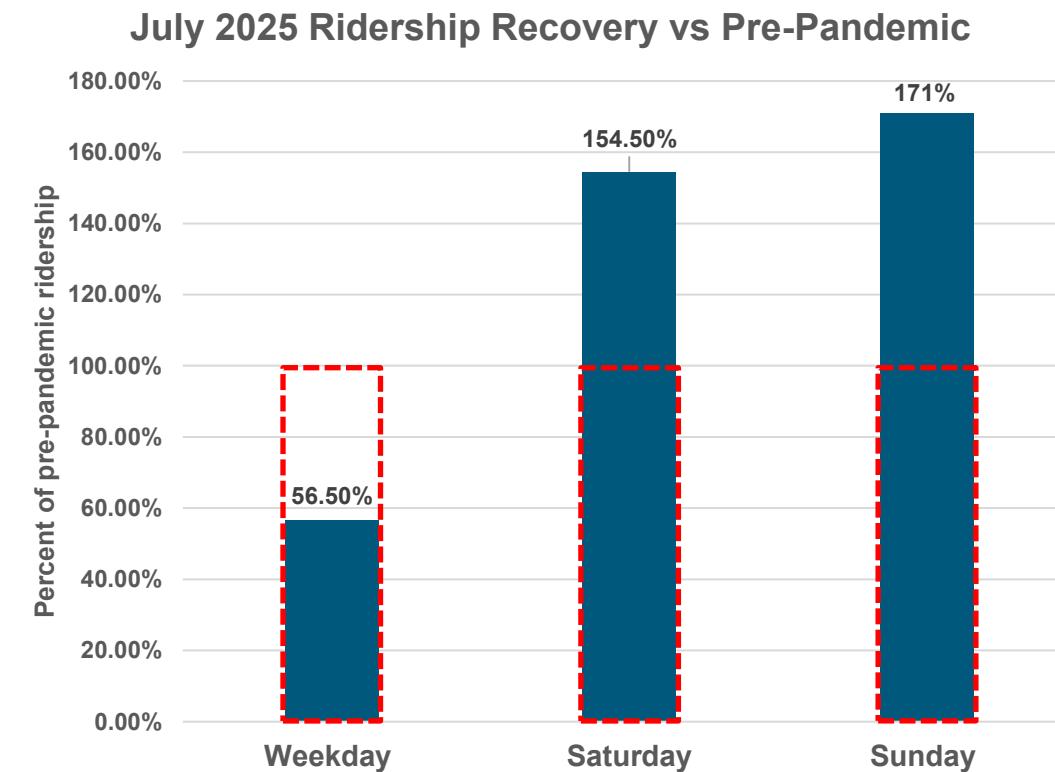
Weekend Ridership Growth Surpasses Weekday

Overall Ridership Growth Accelerated

- July up 77.8% year-over-year
- 64.2% of pre-pandemic ridership
 - Weekdays at +56.5%
 - Weekends at +162.7%

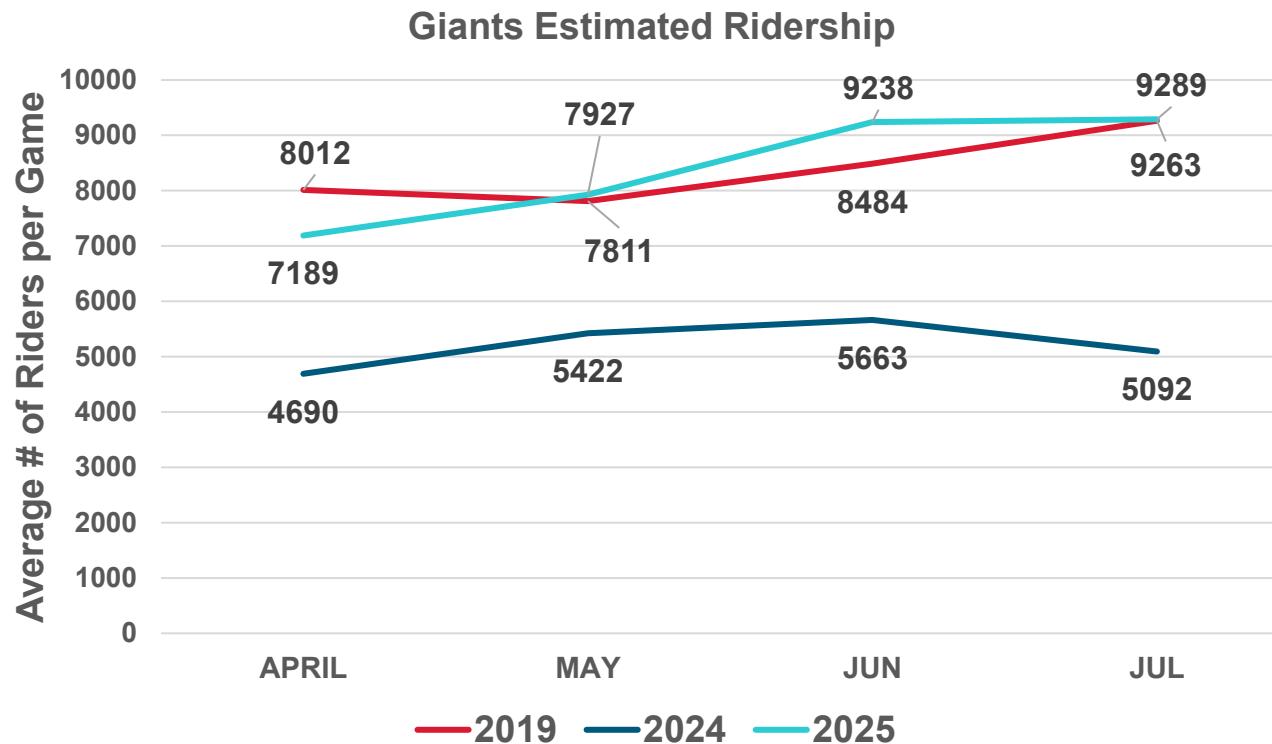
Weekend Ridership Growth

- Surpassed pre-pandemic levels
- Saturday +123% YoY (154% of 2019)
- Sunday +105.9% YoY (171% of 2019)



SF Giants Ridership Surpasses Pre-Pandemic Levels

- Giants ridership exceeded 2019 levels May through July 2025
- 17% overall increase in ridership during Home games vs away days



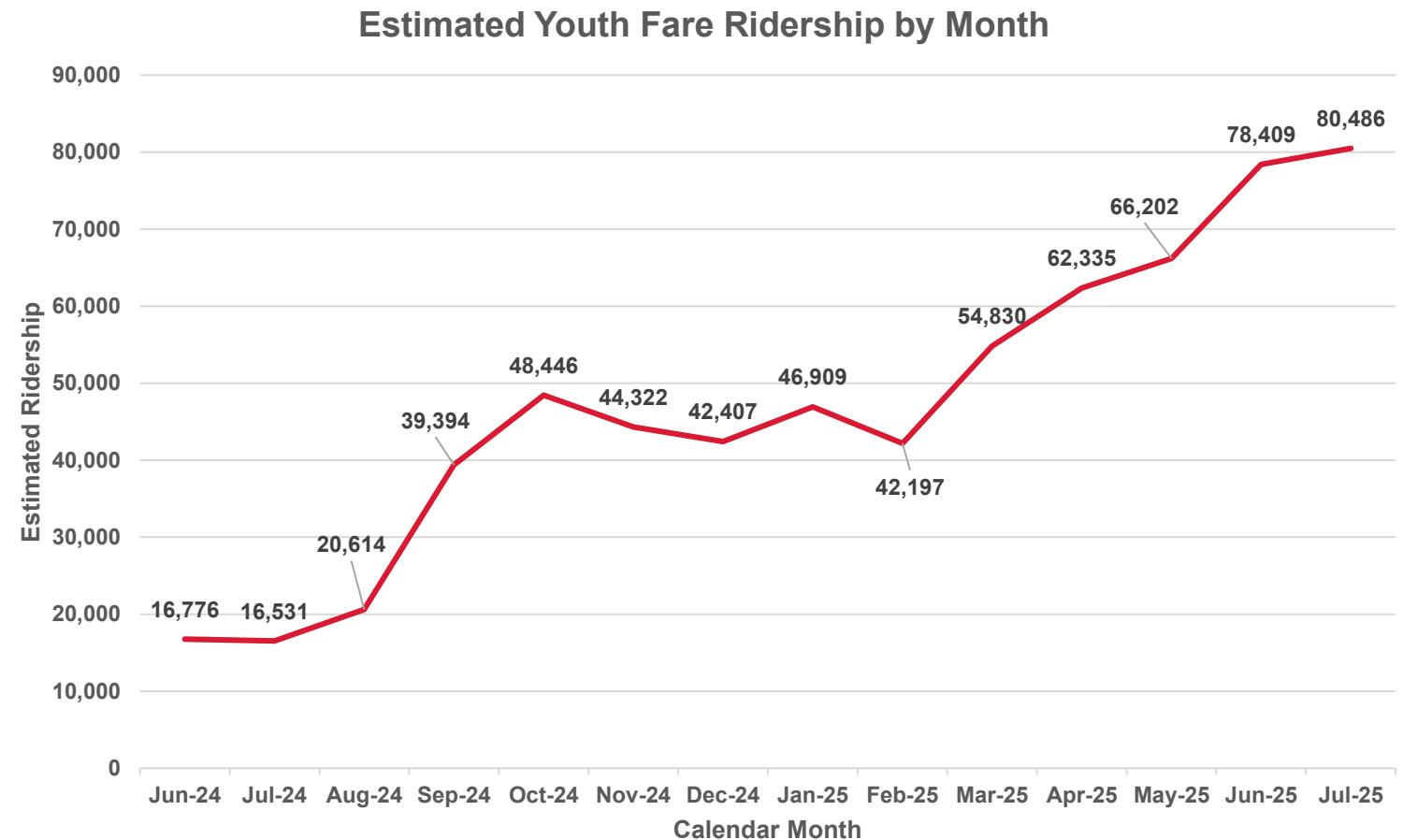
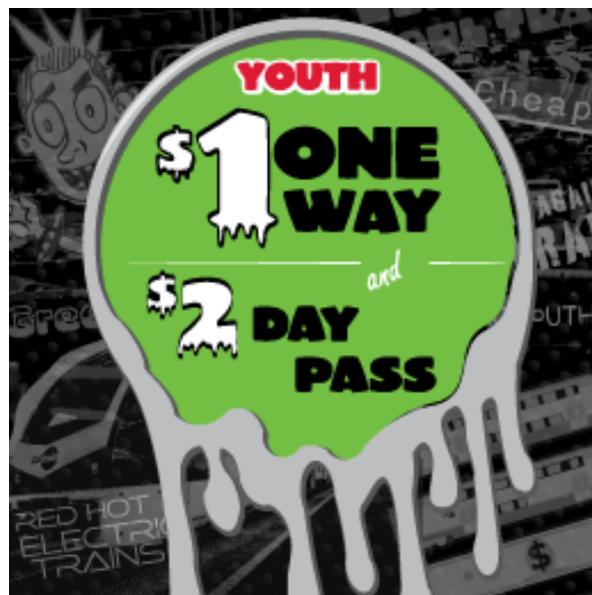
Average Ridership by Day Type and Giants Game Location

Day Type	Giants Game Location		Difference	
	Away	Home	Absolute	Percent
Weekday	29,174	34,659	5,485	18.8%
Saturday	16,740	19,297	2,557	15.3%
Sunday	14,442	16,898	2,456	17.0%



Youth Ridership Quadruples Since July 2024

- Introduced \$1 Youth Fare in 2024
- Youth Fare Ridership has more than quadrupled to 80,486 monthly rides in July 2025



Challenges and Opportunities

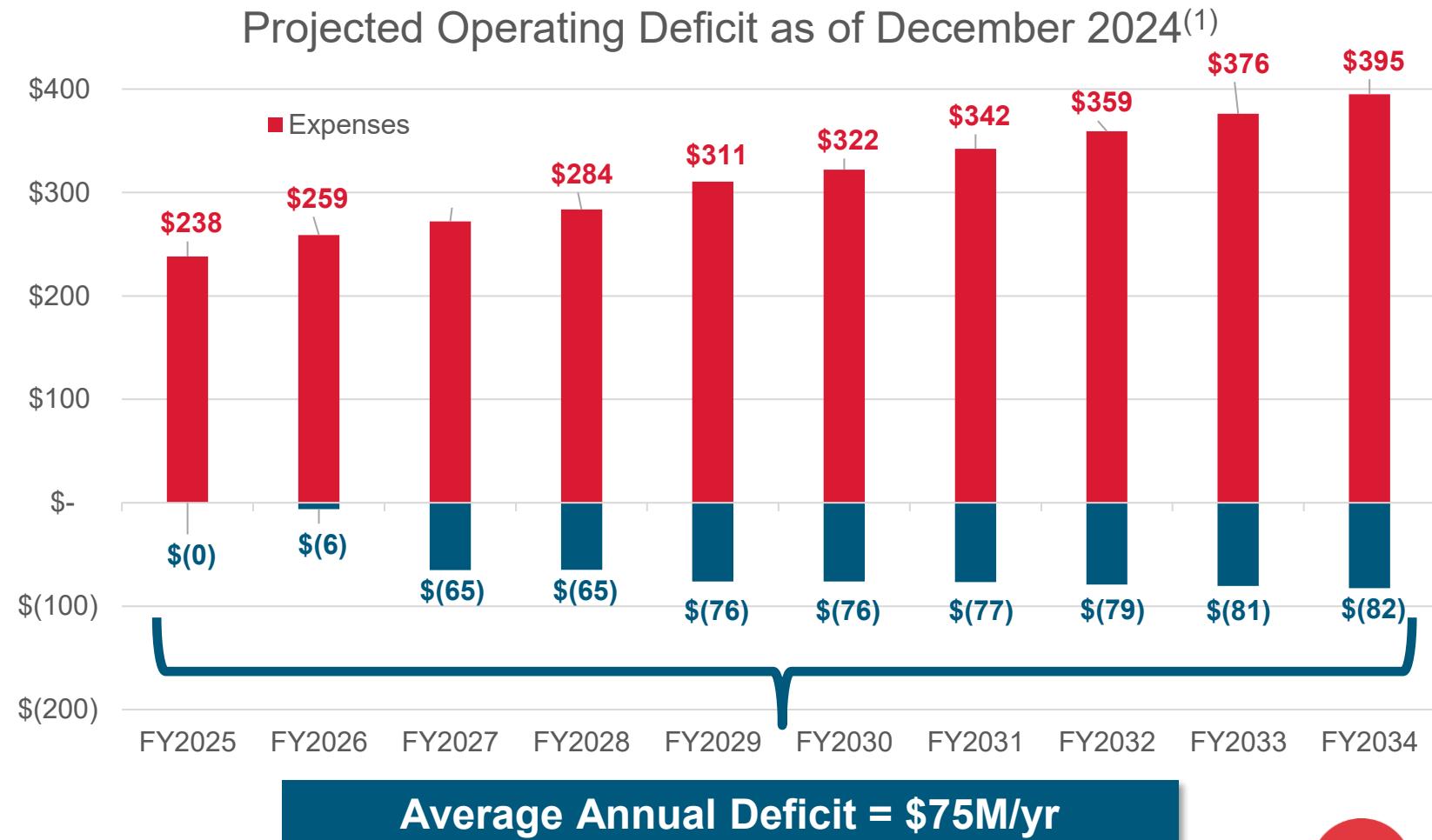
Challenges

Rising Costs and Fiscal Cliff

- Long-term operating deficit
- Pressure to contain labor, energy and capital costs

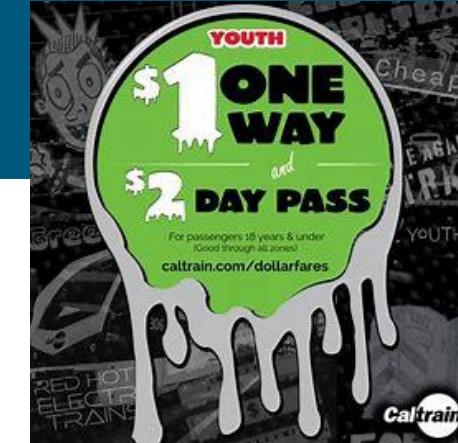
Evolving Ridership Trends

- Peak commuters not fully returning
- Continued work-from-home trends



Ridership Growth Opportunities

- **Focus on Fare Programs:** \$1 youth fare; Caltrain GoPass (business/school program); PassForward equity program
- **Customer Experience:** Wi-fi, alerts, bicycle eLockers, new visual display signs
- **Marketing:** Partnership with event venues, always-on marketing campaign
- **Regional Coordination:** Coordinated transfers, schedule alignment (big sync), fare programs, better signage



Non-Fare Revenue Opportunities

Monetize assets - exploring new revenue sources



Special Events

*Private car
Charter train
Sport events*



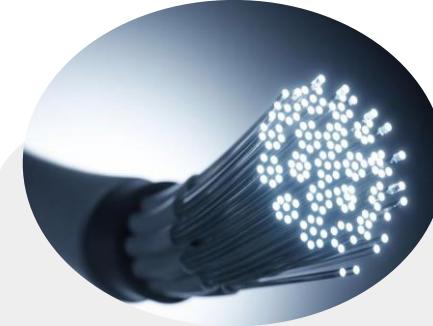
Advertising and Naming Rights

*Expand advertising & media package
train wrapping
naming rights of
rolling stock and
station assets*



Solar, Energy Storage Systems, EV Charging Leasing

Solar farm, energy storage facility for traction power and station energy needs



Fiber Optic Cable and Telecommunications Leasing

*Cell tower leasing
fiber leasing*



TOD and Commercial Leasing

*Property conveyance
lease
commercial leasing
Transit-Oriented Development*

*1-2 Year Short Term
Estimate \$200K- \$1M*

*2-5 Year Medium Term
Estimate \$5 - \$20M*

*5-20 Year Long Term
Estimate \$5-\$10M*

Key Takeaways

- Modernization, increased frequency and enhanced customer experience all are critical to bringing back riders
- Ownership of right-of-way allows more flexibility in service planning to better meet service demands
- Need to focus on different commute patterns; not just a commuter railroad anymore
- Funding challenges remain the most pressing issue

Colorado Rail Project Overview

Review of Mountain Rail and Joint Service



Governor Polis Rail Agenda

- **Governors Rail Team:** Led by Lisa Kaufmann, Governor Polis' Chief of Staff and long-time advisor
 - ◆ Supported by a team that includes staff from CDOT's Division of Transit and Rail, Colorado Transportation Investment Office, and the Governor's Office
- **Mountain Rail - 3 New Daily Round Trips from Denver to Winter Park, to Steamboat Springs.**
 - ◆ **1a:** 1 new daily RT from DUS to Granby by November 2026
 - Future phases to start by 2030 with new low-emissions equipment and expanded service and frequency, and additional stops along the route
 - Executed May 1st, 2025 25-Year Mountain Rail Access Agreement with options to expand service
- **Joint Service:** 3 daily RTs from DUS to Ft. Collins by 2029
 - ◆ Designed to maximize mutually beneficial infrastructure improvements that paves the way for Front Range Passenger rail and increased frequency
 - ◆ Building blocks to Phase I of FRPR
- **Burnham Yard:** Colorado's oldest railyard predates Colorado statehood and has the potential for transit-oriented development

Colorado Rail Project Map Overview



Colorado Rail Opportunities and Challenges

- **Challenges:**
 - ◆ Voters are skeptical government can deliver big rail projects, from region wide unfinished transit and rail projects
 - ◆ Multiple public entities are simultaneously charged with delivering rail projects, each with independent governing boards, leading to a diversion on vision, and straining resource allocation to deliver rail projects
 - ◆ Regulations and state law on insurance and indemnification present challenges and barriers
 - ◆ Colorado voters have historically been skeptical of increasing taxes at the ballot

- **Opportunities:**
 - ◆ Governor Polis and the General Assembly is steadfast on investing in policies that lead to smart growth across Colorado, including expanded transit and rail
 - ◆ The Governor and legislative leadership, through Speaker McCluskie and Senate Pres. Fenberg, created dedicated State revenue to invest in rail projects for both Mountain Rail and Joint Service
 - ◆ Coloradans **do** support expanding passenger rail and prioritizing investments in transit and rail over roads and bridges in concept.

Colorado's Progress to Date

→ Accomplishments to Date:

- Over \$150M/annual in new annual investments in transit and rail through new daily rental car fee and new fee on oil and gas extraction starting in 2026
- New state investment in Winter Park Express that slashed ticket prices and spiked ridership. (26.5K new riders this year!)
- New 25 year Access Agreement with Union Pacific for Mountain Rail and Commitment to start new daily roundtrip by 2026
- Formed a new legal entity amongst six public entities to negotiate an access agreement to commence rail on Colorado's Front Range with BNSF
- Dedicated stakeholder outreach to local governments and technical staff to build buy-in and support
 - On Mountain Rail, this led to nearly all local City Council's adopting resolutions of support, and that station development would be oriented towards inducing ridership, mobility connectivity, and economic development

Mountain Rail Milestone: Moffat Tunnel & Passenger Rail Agreement

The newly signed lease agreement between the State of Colorado and Union Pacific marks a transformative step toward expanding passenger rail service across the state.

25-Year Agreement Signed

The historic lease replaces the 1926 agreement between Colorado and Union Pacific.



Secures Passenger Rail Access

Allows up to 3 daily round trips, over 500,000 train miles annually.



Preserves Freight Operations

Ensures continued freight access through the Moffat Tunnel.



Enables Future Expansion

Supports future service to Winter Park, Fraser, Steamboat, and Craig.



Targets 2026 Launch

Daily passenger service between Denver and Granby is set to begin in November 2026.



Joint Service Basics

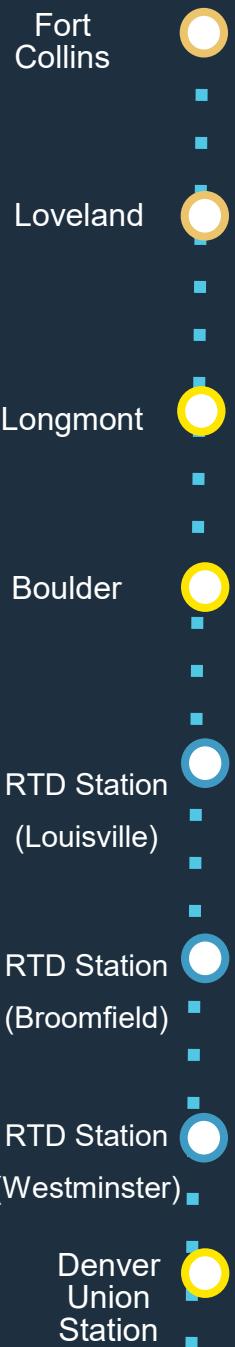
→ Foundational:

- ◆ **One** operator running the service between Denver and Ft. Collins
- ◆ **One** access agreement with BNSF to allow for passenger rail service
- ◆ **One** route - RTD B-Line before transferring to the BNSF freight rail line to Ft. Collins

→ Explainer:

- ◆ **Operator:** By having **one operator**, we reduce inefficiencies and make it easier for all parties to coordinate and ensure that service is frequent and reliable.
- ◆ **Access Agreement:** By having a **singular access agreement**, this ensures the host railroad, BNSF, can more easily and efficiently work with the operator.
- ◆ **One Route:** By utilizing RTD's B- Line, a route widely studied, well-known, and accepted across the region, we can more easily plan and execute passenger rail service on an expeditious timeline.

Joint Corridor Service
3 daily round trips starting in 2029





Joint Corridor Service
3 daily round trips starting in 2029

Colorado Rail Summary

→ Driving for Results:

- Colorado has opportunities to establish new passenger rail by underutilized rail infrastructure in both corridors, Mountain Rail and Joint Service
- Political leadership matters - from the Governor to legislative leadership, dedicated and strong leadership has made transit and rail expansion a reality for Coloradans
- Early engagement and communication with Class I Railroads has been pivotal in advancing Colorado's simultaneous rail projects
- Unified local support also makes a large difference in advancing rail projects
- Leading consultant and staff teams to deliver cost-efficient projects is a challenge in project delivery

Passenger Rail – The Virginia Model

Freight Railroad Agreements & Transforming Rail in Virginia

March 2021

VPRA acquires about 400 miles of RR corridor from CSX; funding partners with Amtrak and regional commuter rail provider

June 2022

NS and VPRA sign legal agreements to add a second Roanoke train and expand service to New River Valley

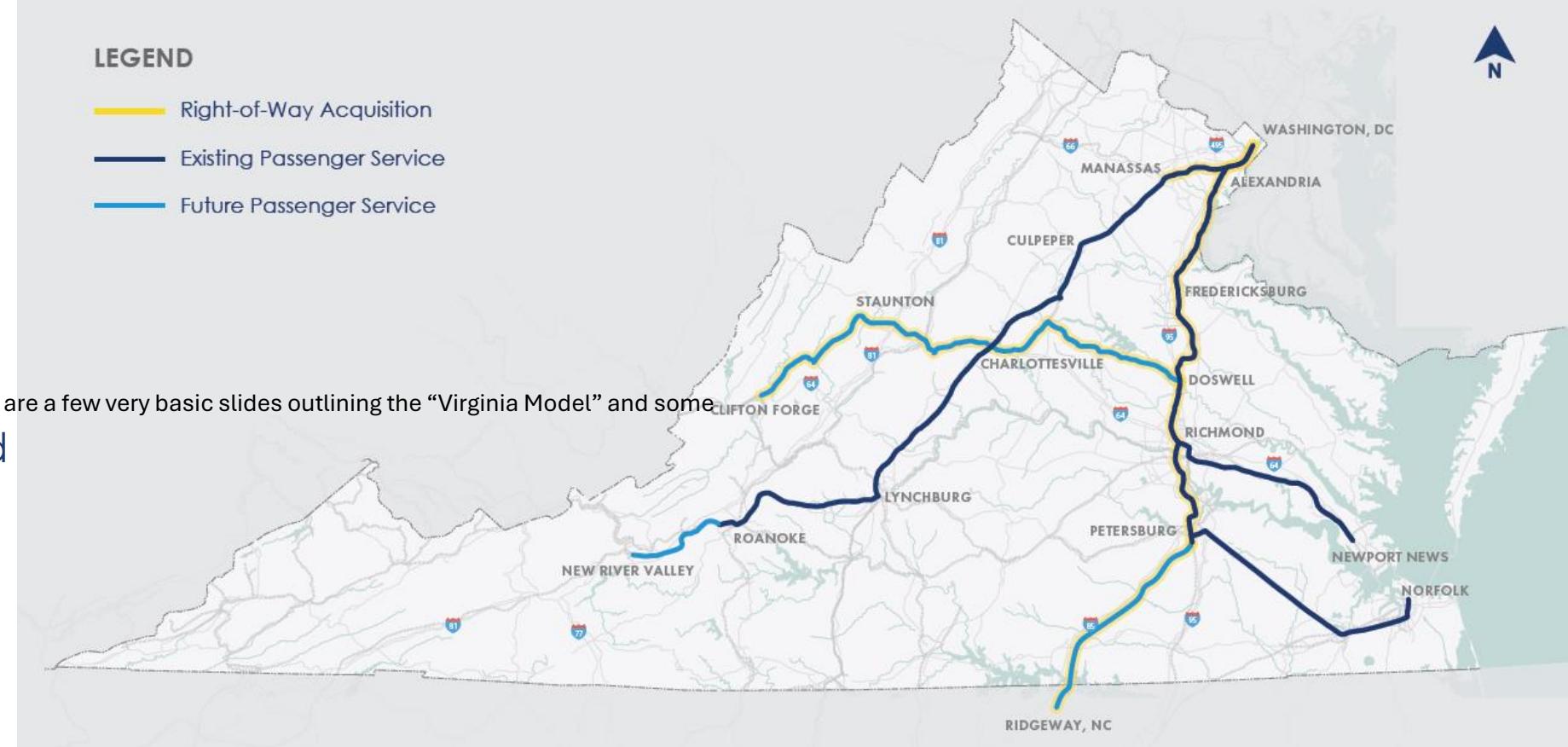
September 2024

VPRA signs agreement with NS to purchase Manassas Line

LEGEND

- Right-of-Way Acquisition
- Existing Passenger Service
- Future Passenger Service

Here are a few very basic slides outlining the “Virginia Model” and some



Virginia Model

- Virginia Passenger Rail Authority created in 2020 (Va. Code Sec. 33.2-287 et seq.)
 - Dedicated statutory funding stream (Va. Code Sec. 33.2-1526.4)
- Corridor ownership preferred (not just access)
 - Longitudinal split along critical I-95 corridor
- Liability
 - No-fault regime as baseline with a few twists
- No direct passenger (or freight) operations
 - Amtrak (intercity)
 - Virginia Railway Express (commuter)



Virginia Model, cont.

- Hybrid path to additional passenger service
 - Up-front frequencies coupled with line purchases
 - Unlocked frequencies after capital improvements
 - Many being completed by freight RRs
- Key Rights Retained by Freights
 - Freight operations (*State of Maine*)
 - Corridor monetization (utilities, billboards, etc.)
- Dispatch and Maintenance
 - Freights continue to perform during “transition periods”
- Customer Service and Cost Recovery

Some Virginia Lessons

- Opportunities can be infrequent
- Projects take a lot of time
 - Many stakeholders to coordinate
- Alternative project delivery can be especially tricky
- Railroads are rational actors
 - Be very thoughtful about incentives



Thank You!

