United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

May 2025

COMMUTER RAIL

Most Systems Struggling to Recover Ridership Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

GAO-25-107511

Highlights

Highlights of GAO-25-107511, a report to congressional requesters

May 2025

COMMUTER RAIL

Most Systems Struggling to Recover Ridership Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Why GAO Did This Study

Roughly 5 years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, transit agencies report that it has significantly affected how individuals use and prioritize public transit in their daily activities. Many rail systems historically operated to serve passengers riding to and from city centers. Commuter rail was particularly affected by the pandemic and related increased telework. In response to the pandemic, Congress provided over $69 billion in relief funding to the transit industry. The federal public health emergency ended in 2023.

GAO was asked to provide an update to its 2021 report on the status of commuter rail systems' operations and funding. This report examines how, since the COVID-19 pandemic, (1) commuter rail service and ridership have changed; and (2) funding sources and operating costs for these systems have changed.

GAO analyzed DOT service and ridership data from January 2019 through December 2024 for the nation's 31 commuter rail systems. GAO also collected and analyzed funding and cost data for these systems for fiscal year 2023 using a web survey and compared these data to fiscal year 2019 data.

GAO also reviewed relevant federal statutes and guidance and interviewed DOT officials, industry association representatives, and a nongeneralizable sample of 10 transit agencies operating commuter rail systems. These agencies were selected based on ridership levels and whether the agencies offered multiple transit modes, among other things.

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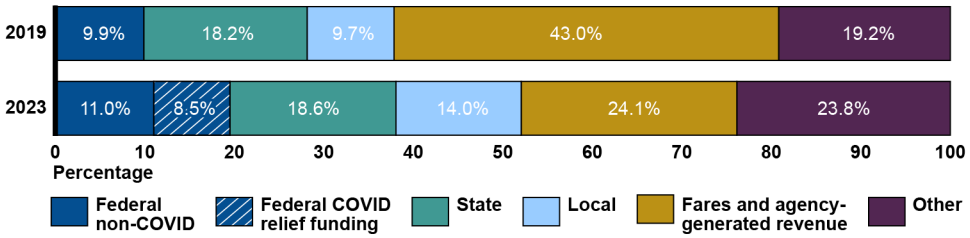
What GAO Found

Commuter rail is a transit alternative to driving between suburban communities and city centers. Industry-wide data show that the nation's 31 commuter rail systems as a whole are providing service above pre-pandemic levels, but significant variation exists by system. GAO's analysis of data from the Department of Transportation (DOT) shows that service at 19 systems was near or above pre-pandemic levels from July through December 2024. However, service at five systems remains more than 25 percent below pre-pandemic levels, and service at the remaining seven systems varies between 8.5 and 23.7 percent below. DOT data also show that ridership for most systems continues to lag behind service levels, though substantial variation also exists. At six systems, ridership from July through December 2024 had recovered or nearly recovered from 2019 levels but were below 2019 levels for the remaining 25 systems. Officials from some of the 10 systems GAO interviewed identified ways they have adapted service to attract riders and better meet changing passenger needs. These adaptations include expanding operations beyond traditional commuting hours, offering free fares and flexible passes for certain passengers (e.g., youth passes), and strategically expanding and adapting service based on community needs and feedback.

Data from GAO's survey of commuter rail systems show that fare revenue from riders was 31 percent lower in fiscal year 2023 for all systems, compared to 2019. To help offset this reduction in fare revenue, commuter rail systems reported increases in the percentage of their total funding comprised of federal, local, or other sources. COVID-19 relief funding comprised a significant portion of the 2023 increase in federal funding (see figure). As of February 2025, officials from 15 of 22 systems that responded to GAO's request said they did not have any COVID-19 funding remaining.

Commuter Rail Systems' Total Funding by Source, Fiscal Years 2019, 2023



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Other funding can include funding from fees paid to use existing track, sale of assets, parking fees, or other sources.

The vast majority of systems also reported increased operating costs in fiscal year 2023 compared to 2019, with a 28 percent increase in nominal operating costs across all systems. According to officials GAO interviewed and GAO's analysis, inflation contributed substantially to the increase in costs. Beyond inflation, officials also said that labor and material costs contributed to higher operating costs, which are affecting systems' ability to plan and implement projects necessary for future operations.

Contents

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Abbreviations

ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
CRRSAA	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021
Denver RTD	Denver Regional Transportation District
DOT	Department of Transportation
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	fiscal year
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
MBTA	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
NTD	National Transit Database
SEPTA	Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority
SMART	Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit
VRE	Virginia Railway Express

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE
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May 7, 2025

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives

The Honorable Troy E. Nehls
House of Representatives

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant effect on public transit across the country. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), stay-at-home orders in 2020 led to ridership dropping 81 percent between April 2019 and April 2020, and the vast majority of transit agencies reducing service. FTA also found that commuter rail, a transit alternative to driving between suburban communities and city centers, was particularly affected by the pandemic.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress enacted three relief laws that provided over $69 billion in funding to the transit industry. FTA, within the Department of Transportation (DOT), distributed these funds to transit agencies through existing formula grant programs.[1] The laws gave recipients flexibilities to use the funding for a wide array of payroll and operating expenses, and some of the funding was required to be used for these purposes to the maximum extent possible.[2]

Roughly 5 years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic—and almost 2 years since the federal public health emergency ended—transit agencies report that the pandemic has significantly affected how individuals use and prioritize public transit in their daily activities. For example, changes in telework patterns during this time affected the demand for transit service that has historically followed 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. commuting

[1]FTA distributed COVID-19 relief funding for transit primarily through the Urbanized Area Formula program and the Formula Grants for Rural Areas program. Formula programs allocate funding to recipients using a distribution formula set by statute.

[2]If the recipient certified to FTA that the recipient had not furloughed any employees, then the recipient was not required to prioritize payroll and operating expenses over other expenses.

patterns.[3] Many commuter rail systems have operated these schedules primarily to serve passengers riding to and from city centers.

You requested that we provide an update to our 2021 report on the status of commuter rail systems' operations and funding.[4] This report examines how, since the COVID-19 pandemic, (1) commuter rail service and ridership have changed; and (2) funding sources and operating costs for these systems have changed. We also present information on specific commuter rail systems in appendix I.

To address these objectives, we analyzed service, ridership, and cost data from fiscal year (FY) 2019 through FY 2023 for the 31 commuter rail systems within the FTA's National Transit Database (NTD).[5] We reported the most recent data by calendar month for each system, including ridership data through December 2024.[6] In addition to the data available in NTD, we also conducted a web-based survey to collect and analyze data on systems, funding, and costs for FY 2023 from the 31 commuter rail systems. Where applicable, we adjusted data for inflation to 2023 dollars.[7]

We assessed the reliability of the data using several methods, including reviewing NTD documentation, interviewing DOT officials, and conducting several data checks. To account for data limitations we found within the NTD, we did not use data on operating cost metrics marked questionable by FTA (e.g., if the transit agency did not follow prescribed procedures or if the estimates are deemed unreasonable) and requested more specific revenue data from surveyed transit agencies. After excluding the NTD

[3]On January 20, 2025, a Presidential memorandum required the heads of executive branch agencies to take necessary steps to require employees to return to work in-person full time at their respective duty stations. See Return to In-Person Work Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, 90 Fed. Reg. 8251 (Jan. 20, 2025).

[4]GAO, *Commuter Rail: Information on Benefits and Funding Challenges for Service in Less Urbanized Communities*, GAO-21-355R (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 1, 2021).

[5]The 31 commuter rail systems include all systems in the U.S. classified as commuter rail, as well as certain hybrid rail systems and two legacy Amtrak lines identified as commuter rail systems within the NTD. NTD data are reported by transit agencies at the end of that agency's own fiscal year, which may vary across agencies.

[6]Transit agencies report ridership (in unlinked passenger trips, meaning passengers are counted each time they board) and service metrics monthly to NTD.

[7]We used the FY 2023 gross domestic product index ending in September to adjust for inflation in this report. Transit agencies may end their fiscal year in different months (including June, September, and December).

data marked questionable, we determined that both NTD and our survey were sufficiently reliable for reporting on the 31 systems' service, ridership, funding, and costs.

In addition, we reviewed federal statutes, regulations, and DOT documentation and guidance related to commuter rail operations and funding. We conducted interviews with a non-generalizable selection of 10 transit agencies operating commuter rail systems.[8] To incorporate a variety of perspectives, we selected these systems to ensure diversity in ridership recovery compared to pre-pandemic levels, whether transit agencies operated only commuter rail systems or multiple transit modes, whether the agencies used contractors to operate their commuter rail service, and the geographic locations transit agencies served. We also interviewed one commuter rail industry association (the Commuter Rail Coalition) and DOT officials about issues facing commuter rail systems.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2024 to May 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Commuter Rail Systems

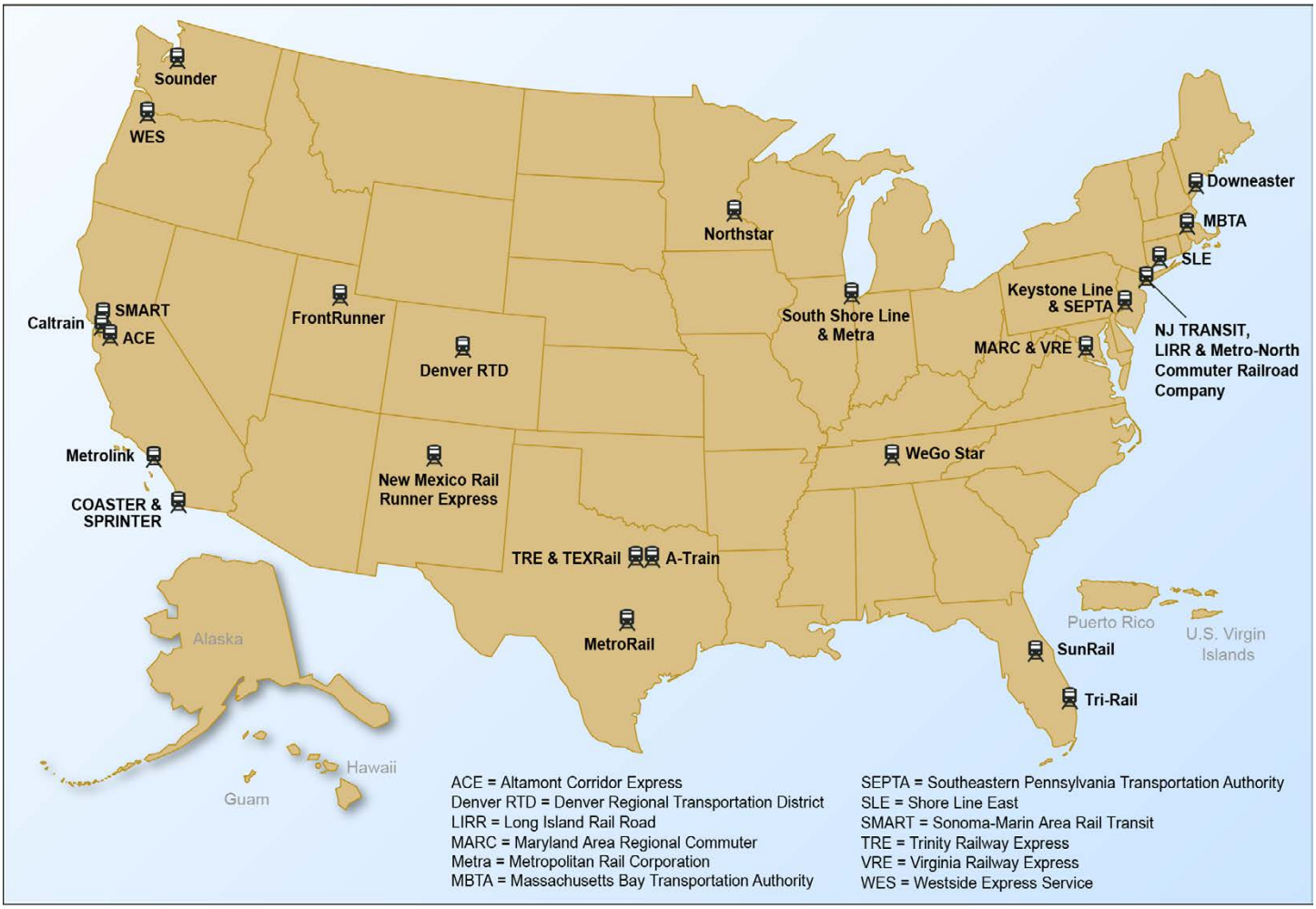
Commuter rail systems are operated by transit agencies, which may also operate other transit modes such as bus, subway, light rail, or ferry.[9] In the U.S., commuter rail systems are located in or around metropolitan areas (see fig. 1). The nation's 31 commuter rail systems vary in the

[8]The 10 commuter rail systems we selected for interviews were Denver Regional Transportation District (Denver RTD), Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), New Jersey Transit, Northstar, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA), Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART), SPRINTER, TEXRail, Tri-Rail, and Virginia Railway Express (VRE).

[9]According to FTA, light rail is an electrically propelled train operating primarily at surface level. Comparatively, commuter rail passenger transportation means short-haul rail passenger transportation in metropolitan and suburban areas usually having reduced fare, multiple-ride, and commuter tickets and morning and evening peak period operations. 49 U.S.C. § 24102. Commuter rail passenger transportation operates on existing railway tracks also used by Amtrak to provide intercity rail passenger transportation and railroads that provide freight transportation.

number of stations they operate, areas they serve, and miles of track they use, among other system characteristics.[10]

Figure 1: Map of 31 Commuter Rail Systems in the U.S.



Sources: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data and Map Resources. | GAO-25-107511

Commuter rail service can vary based on the days of the week that service is operated, the direction the trains run (both directions at once or only the direction of peak service), and the hours in service. Service levels can be measured in a number of ways, including by vehicle

[10]See appendix I for summaries of the operations, ridership, and funding sources for all 31 commuter rail systems across the country.

revenue hours and vehicle revenue miles. These measures account for the hours or miles that trains are operating and can carry passengers, and do not include when trains do not carry passengers (e.g., during maintenance testing or training). Ridership is typically measured by "unlinked passenger trips," which include the number of passengers who board public transportation vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board a vehicle, including transfers.

Federal Roles and Responsibilities

Within DOT, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and FTA oversee commuter rail operations.[11] FRA oversees safety in rail transportation, and FRA's Passenger Rail Division provides technical expertise and direction in the development and implementation of rail safety programs applicable to commuter rail operations. FRA also administers federal grant funds to eligible rail carriers that provide intercity rail passenger transportation (Amtrak) and freight rail transportation for eligible infrastructure, service, safety improvement, and congestion relief projects. This funding may benefit commuter rail systems due to their shared infrastructure with Amtrak and freight rail systems. However, FRA is generally prohibited from providing grant funding for commuter rail passenger transportation.[12] FTA promotes the development, improvement, and safety of public transportation systems, which include commuter rail systems, through a variety of federal grant programs to local transit agencies.[13]

FTA also administers the NTD, which collects, validates, and publishes financial, operating, geographic service area coverage, and asset condition information for transit systems in the U.S. Transit agencies that receive grants from the FTA under the Urbanized Area Formula program or Formula Grants for Rural Areas program are required to submit data to

[11]For the purposes of FRA safety oversight, rapid transit operations in an urban area that are not connected to the general railroad system are excluded from FRA's safety oversight. FRA will presume that an operation is an urban rapid transit operation if there is not a statutory determination that Congress considers a particular service to be commuter rail and the operation is a subway or elevated operation with its own track system on which no other railroad may operate, has no highway-rail crossings at grade, operates within an urban area, and moves passengers from station to station within the urban area as one of its major functions. 49 C.F.R. Part 209, Appendix A. According to FTA, these systems, also known as fixed guideway systems, are subject to FTA's safety oversight program.

[12]49 U.S.C. § 22905(f).

[13]While FTA grant programs can be used to fund eligible safety improvements in commuter rail systems, the FRA has primary safety jurisdiction and oversight responsibilities, and commuter railroads must comply with FRA safety regulations.

the NTD. Among the required data are annual operating expenses, service levels, ridership levels, and funding sources.

Commuter Rail Funding

Transit agencies fund their commuter rail systems through federal funding, state and local funding (e.g., sales taxes), and passenger fares and agency-generated revenue (e.g., advertising), among other sources. Regarding federal funding, FTA provides funding to transit agencies through formula and competitive grant programs. FTA distributes formula grant funding based on specific parameters set by Congress, and transit agencies decide how to disburse this funding across their various modes (e.g., commuter rail and bus) for a wide variety of eligible expenses. FTA awards competitive grants for specific eligible projects through a competitive application and selection process. In general, transit agencies, with some exceptions, can only use federal funding for capital expenses. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided funding for a wide variety of formula and competitive grant programs that are available to fund commuter rail (see appendix II).[14]

Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided funding that agencies could use for operating expenses related to COVID-19 response and recovery.[15] While CARES Act and CRRSAA funding has no deadline by which the funds must be used, ARPA funding must be disbursed by September 30, 2029.

[14]IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429 (2021). On January 20, 2025, the Administration issued an Executive Order to pause the disbursement of certain funds appropriated through the IIJA and directed agencies to review their processes, policies, and programs for issuing grants and other financial disbursements under the IIJA for consistency with the law and the policy of the Executive Order. See Exec. Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy*, 90 Fed. Reg. 8353 (Jan. 20, 2025).

[15]CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136, 134 Stat. 281, 599-600 (2020); CRRSAA, Pub. L. No. 116-260, 134 Stat. 1909, 1947 (2020); ARPA, Pub. L. No. 117-2, 135 Stat. 4, 72 (2021).

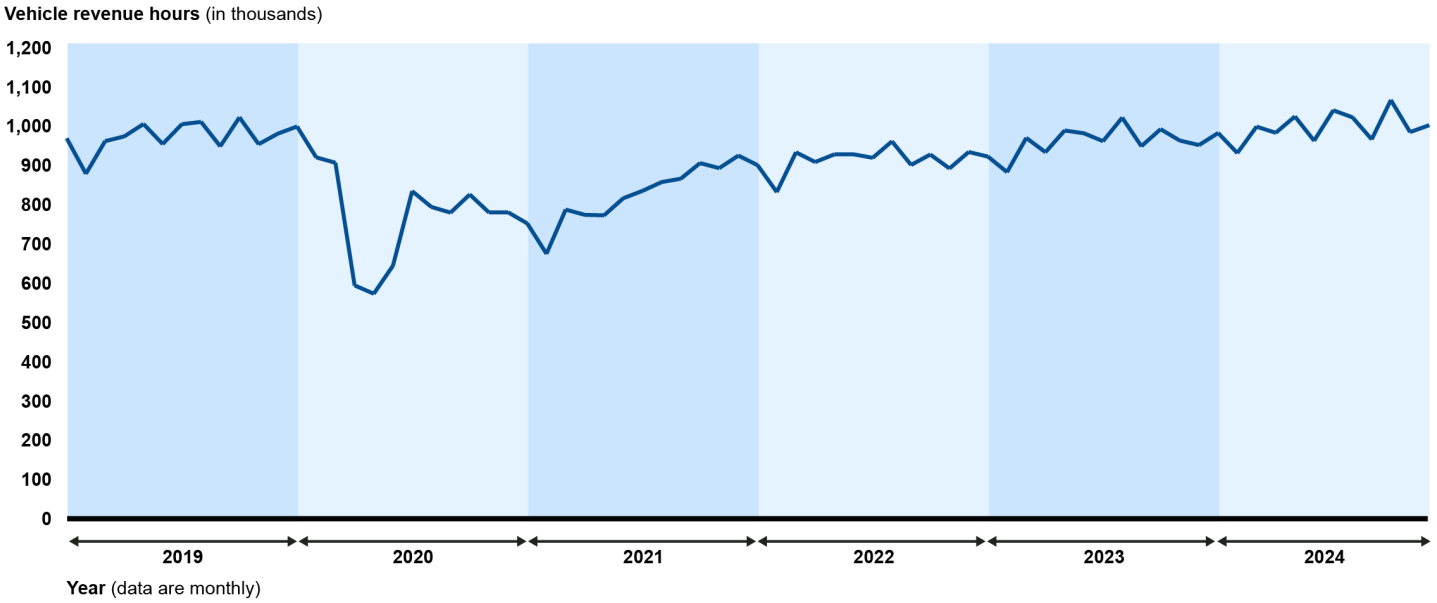
Over Half of Systems Are Providing Service Near or Above Pre-Pandemic Levels, but Most Systems' Ridership Has Not Recovered

Service Levels Vary Significantly by System, with Over Half Providing Service Near or Above Pre-Pandemic Levels

Industry-wide data show that commuter rail service is above pre-pandemic levels (see fig. 2). Specifically, commuter rail service levels in total were about 2.7 percent above pre-pandemic levels for the last 6 months ending in December 2024, compared to the same time period in December 2019.[16]

[16]As of February 2025, four commuter rail systems had not submitted complete 2024 data to the NTD. The 2.7 percent calculation does not include the missing months for those four systems, therefore it results in a slight undercount of vehicle revenue hours in those months. Since the four systems in total represent only 1.3 percent of the industry vehicle revenue hours from January 2019 through December 2024, it would not significantly affect the calculation of the 2024 industry-wide service levels.

Figure 2: Total Commuter Rail Service (Measured in Vehicle Revenue Hours), January 2019 through December 2024



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

However, industry-wide data mask significant variations that exist among systems. Over half of commuter rail systems (19 of 31) were operating near or above pre-pandemic service levels from July through December 2024 compared to the same 6-month period in 2019, based on our analysis of NTD data (see fig.3).[17]

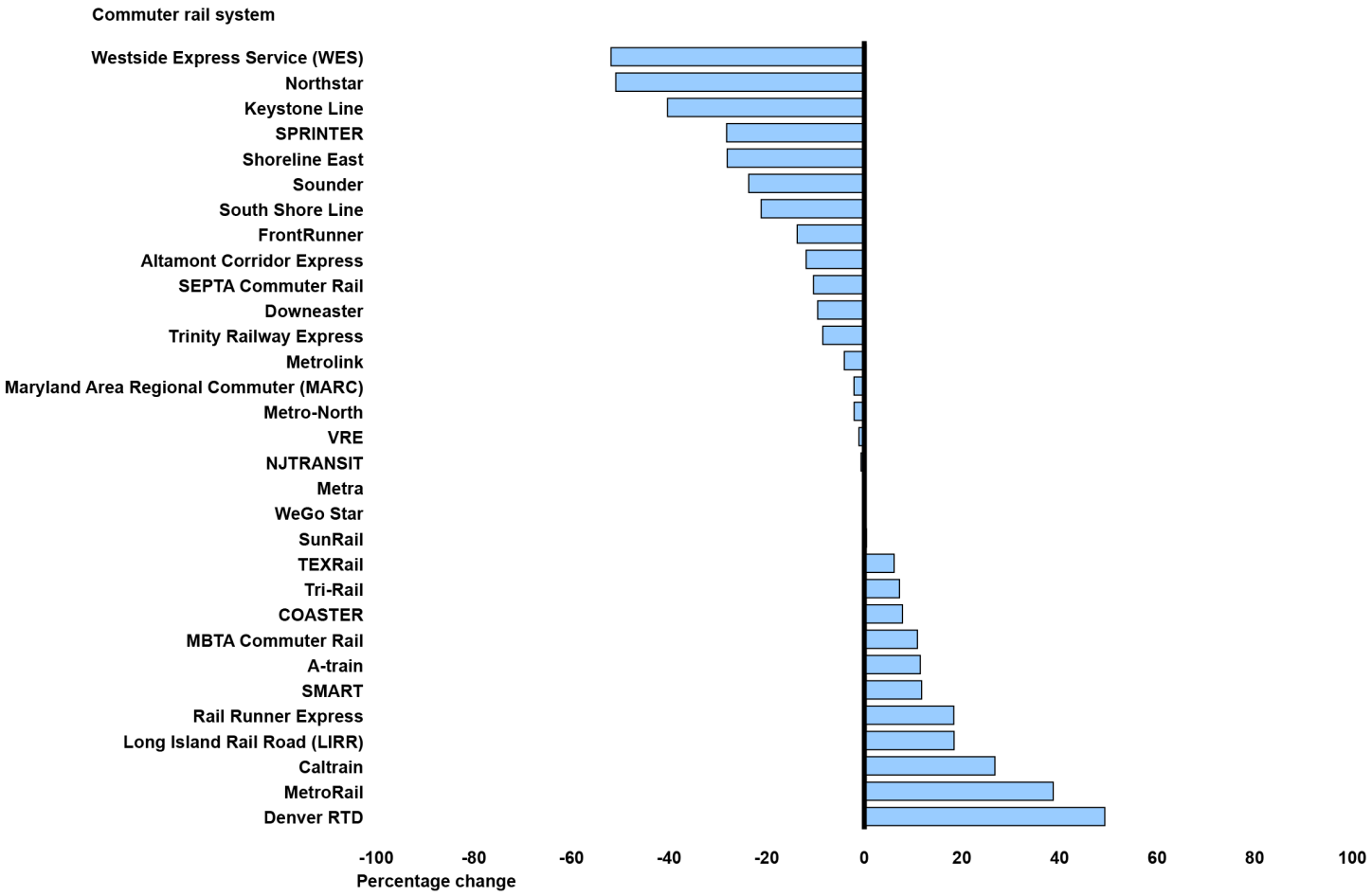
Service levels among those 19 systems ranged from Metrolink (in Southern California) operating slightly below pre-pandemic levels (-4.1 percent) to Denver RTD increasing service significantly with a new

[17]This analysis was based on vehicle revenue hours. FTA defines vehicle revenue hours as the hours that vehicles actually travel while in revenue service (the time when a vehicle is available to the public). Vehicle revenue hours include layover and recovery time but exclude hours for service without passengers (e.g., when changing routes or traveling to maintenance facilities), operator training, vehicle maintenance testing, and other non-revenue uses of vehicles. We define "nearly" recovered as being within 5 percent of pre-pandemic service for the given time period. For systems with incomplete data (Downeaster, Keystone, Shore Line East, WeGo Star) we calculated this 6-month percentage using the most recent 6-month time period available in NTD and compared that to the same 6-month time period in 2019.

commuter rail line (+49.3 percent).[18] Among the remaining 12 systems, service at five systems was more than 25 percent below pre-pandemic levels, and service at seven systems varied between 8.5 and 23.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. Transit agency officials from one system operating below 2019 levels told us that they are waiting to assess demand for commuter rail service before considering any increase in service. As such, these officials said they are planning for it to take longer to return to their previous service levels.

[18]We refer to systems by name when referring to our analyses of NTD or survey data. We anonymize system information when discussing information from our interviews. Service levels here do not capture schedule changes that commuter rail systems may have made since the pandemic. For example, transit agencies may have shifted schedules to different times of day, while maintaining the overall number of hours that trains are running in a 24-hour period.

Figure 3: Commuter Rail System Service Recovery, Percentage Change in Total Vehicle Revenue Hours Between July–December 2019 and July–December 2024



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: As of February 2025, four systems had submitted incomplete service data to the National Transit Database (Downeaster, Keystone, Shore Line East, WeGo Star). For these systems, we calculated the percentage change using the most recent 6-month time period available in the National Transit Database and compared that to the same 6-month time period in 2019.

We did not identify a connection between service level recovery and the size of a commuter rail system.[19] For example, there were both smaller and larger systems among those that recovered to near or above pre-pandemic service levels—including the smaller system A-Train in Denton

[19]Here, system size refers to the total miles of track (total directional route miles) of the commuter rail system.

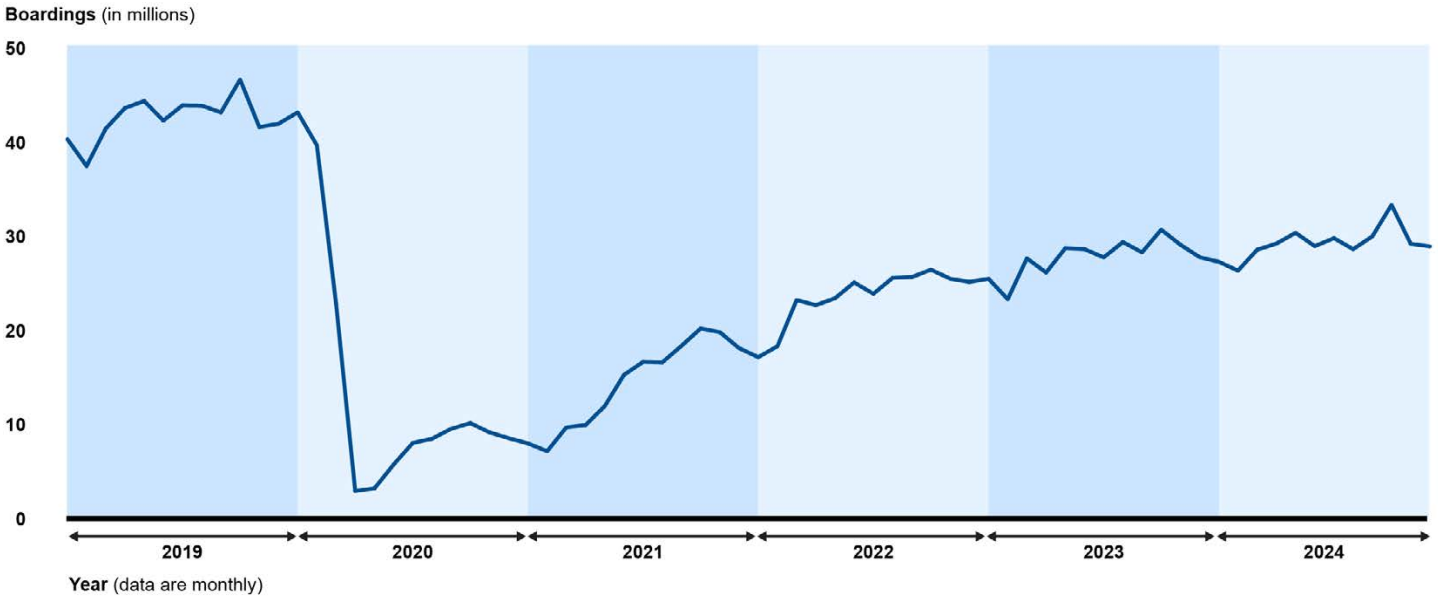
County, Texas (+11.5 percent) and the larger Long Island Rail Road (+18.4 percent).

Our survey of the 31 systems also found that most commuter rail systems continue to operate the same number of stations as they did before the pandemic. Twenty-two systems reported that they operated the same number of stations in FY 2023 as they did in FY 2019. Of the remaining nine systems, seven added at least one station and two closed one or more stations. An official from one system that closed stations during this time period told us they did so because five stations had little ridership even before the pandemic. For that system, the closed stations were already located near other stations on the commuter rail line.

Ridership Has Been Slowly Rebounding, with Most Systems' Ridership Remaining Below Pre-Pandemic Levels

Our analysis of NTD data show that commuter rail ridership has been slowly rebounding from pandemic lows. After significantly declining in the first half of 2020, total ridership summed across all 31 systems has steadily increased (see fig. 4). However, total ridership for all 31 systems from July through December 2024 remained about 31 percent below pre-pandemic levels (July through December 2019).

Figure 4: Total Commuter Rail Ridership (Measured in Unlinked Passenger Trips), January 2019–December 2024



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Transit agencies report commuter rail ridership to the National Transit Database monthly, measured in unlinked passenger trips. Unlinked passenger trips include the number of passengers

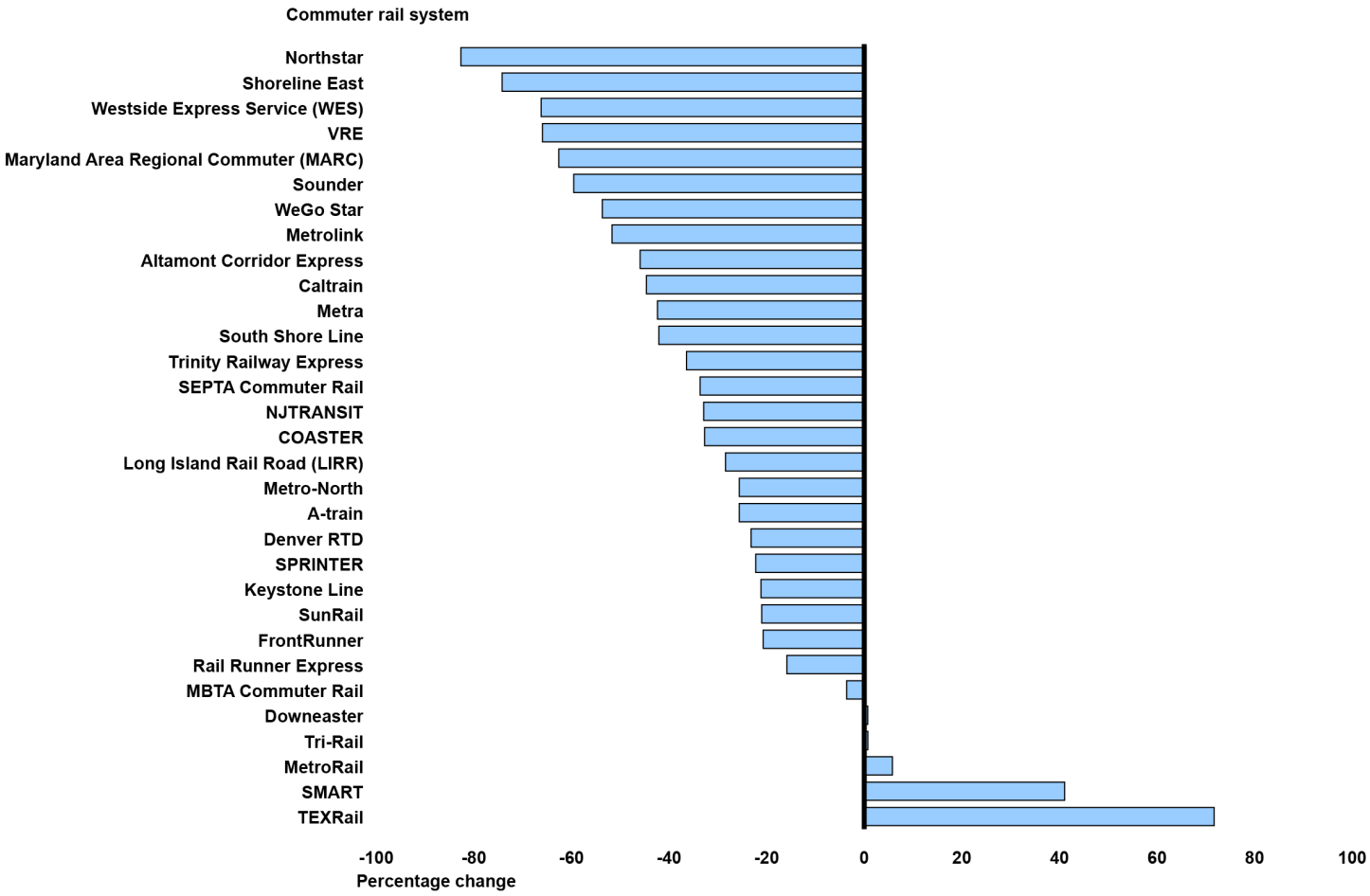
who board public transportation vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board a vehicle, including transfers.

Similar to data for individual systems' service levels, NTD ridership data show significant variation among systems' ridership recovery.[20] For example, our analysis showed that from July through December 2024, ridership at six systems had recovered or nearly recovered compared with the same time period in 2019, while ridership at 17 systems remained 16 to 46 percent below pre-pandemic levels (see fig. 5).[21] Ridership at the eight remaining systems was 50 percent or more below pre-pandemic levels. These results show that ridership recovery has lagged behind commuter rail service recovery for many systems.

[20]For more detailed ridership and operational information on each commuter rail system, see the commuter rail snapshots presented in appendix I.

[21]We define "nearly" recovered as being within 5 percent of pre-pandemic ridership for the given time period. Note in figure 5 this includes MBTA whose ridership was 3.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 5: Commuter Rail System Ridership Recovery, Percentage Change in Total Unlinked Passenger Trips Between July–December 2019 and July–December 2024



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

We did not identify a strong connection between ridership recovery and the size of a commuter rail system. For example, between July and December 2024, some larger systems like Metra, which connects neighboring cities to Chicago, remained far below pre-pandemic ridership (-42 percent) while other larger systems like MBTA, which connects neighboring cities to Boston, are nearing pre-pandemic ridership (-3.6 percent) over the same time period. Similarly, a smaller system like SMART is operating with 41 percent higher ridership than before the pandemic, but the ridership of similarly small Northstar remains roughly 83 percent below pre-pandemic levels.

Despite Structural Challenges, Some Systems Are Trying to Adapt Service to Better Meet Riders' Needs

As discussed earlier, commuter rail operates on a fixed track and was historically designed to transport people from outer areas to city centers for work and other activities. This structure creates challenges by reducing a transit agency's ability to modify its operations in ways such as:

- **Cutting costs.** As documented by FTA, commuter rail has high costs compared to other transit modes like bus service, and it is not as easy to recoup costs by scaling down rail service.[22] We have previously reported that, according to rail officials, commuter rail uses more expensive infrastructure, such as tracks, passenger stations, rail cars, and signaling.[23] In addition, the cost of keeping a rail station open and staffed remains the same each day no matter how many trains stop there. Cutting service also comes with additional risks. As FTA documented and officials at one system told us, cutting service to adapt to reduced ridership introduces the risk of the "death spiral" of transit service for any mode. In other words, reduced service further reduces ridership, leading to further cuts in service, and eventually repeated reductions in ridership and service.
- **Adjusting to new telework patterns.** Commuter rail systems were designed to transport people into city centers. Therefore, commuter rail operations are particularly affected by changes in telework patterns and related commuting hours, according to officials from two transit agencies and FTA. For example, officials from one transit agency told us about significant differences in ridership on their two rail systems based on telework patterns. Those officials said that they saw ridership drop dramatically on the system that primarily serves workers who were able to telework during the pandemic. However, officials told us that ridership remains much more consistent on the system that serves more workers who are essential to maintain critical infrastructure and continue critical services.
- **Changing schedules and stations.** Transit agencies can also face challenges implementing schedule changes on commuter rail systems, according to officials from two transit agencies. For instance, a transit agency may be unable to make changes to their system's schedule because they do not own the track on which the trains run. In these cases, transit agencies may have to negotiate the service schedule they are able to offer with the "host" railroad that owns the

[22]Federal Transit Administration, *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Transit Ridership and Accessibility*, FTA Report No. 0268 (Washington, D.C.: August 2024).

[23]GAO-21-355R.

track.[24] It may also be difficult to add or change stations, as building track and stations is more expensive than adding stations on a bus route, for example. Officials from another transit agency told us that two recent transit expansions were more easily implemented with bus and light rail compared to commuter rail. These officials said that, among other things, additional buses are cheaper to deploy than additional trains or stations, and buses use existing roads to operate. Overall, transit agencies that operate multiple modes (rail, bus, etc.) generally have greater flexibility and more options they can use to meet the needs of the community.

Despite these challenges, officials from several of the 10 commuter rail systems we interviewed identified ways they have adapted service to attract riders and better meet changing passenger needs:

- **Extending service beyond traditional commuting hours.** Officials from seven systems said commuting patterns no longer reflect traditional 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. commuting hours in their service areas. As a result, officials from five of these systems have expanded their commuter rail service beyond traditional commuting hours, including adding or expanding weekend or midday train service. One system's officials said that moving to all-day service has been the biggest driver of the system's success in bringing back riders. In particular, adding midday service provided an option for workers who want to go into an office for a meeting and then return home. Notably, four of these five systems own all or most of their respective track, according to transit agency officials and documents we reviewed. Such ownership mitigated the added challenge of negotiating schedule changes for these agencies.
- **Offering free fares or flex/youth passes.** Transit agency officials from five systems said that their systems have implemented new fare or pass structures, including free youth passes and flat weekend fares, to increase commuter rail's appeal to riders. Officials at one system said that offering free youth fares encourages families to use the system and creates lifelong transit users. For another system, officials said offering free youth passes helped build a habit of taking transit for new riders. In addition, one transit official attributed some of its system's significant increases in weekend ridership to the agency's

[24]As we have previously reported, commuter rail systems can operate some or all of their trains as "tenants" on the track of another railroad (e.g., Amtrak or a freight railroad), known as the "host." GAO, *Commuter Rail: Agencies' Estimates of Operations and Maintenance Costs for Positive Train Control*, GAO-24-106329 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 10, 2024).

$10 weekend fare program, which allows riders to use the train all weekend for a flat price.

- **Pursuing strategic system expansion.** Officials at three commuter rail systems told us they are pursuing different types of system expansions to increase ridership. The expansions include adding new stations and on-demand bus shuttle service beyond the commuter rail line, opening previously planned new stations, and providing special service to community events. For example, officials at one system added shuttle service from the commuter rail station to the county airport and wineries in the area. According to the officials, doing so helped bridge a service gap between one part of the commuter rail line and popular destinations. At another system, officials added train service to transport riders to professional sporting events, a popular service that was suspended during the pandemic.
- **Adapting service based on community feedback.** Two transit agencies we interviewed made several commuter rail system changes based on community feedback. For instance, officials at one system added another morning train based on parent requests to accommodate travel to school. Officials said the agency has also tried several other service changes based on customer feedback. Officials from another system added two late night trains to the system in response to feedback from airport employees who did not have a transit option for the late-night shift. They discussed the plan with airport staff and surveyed employees as a part of this effort.

While officials from some systems said these actions helped their ridership levels recover, others also identified system characteristics that aided in their recovery. Officials we interviewed said they benefit from unique aspects of their communities, including a tourism economy (four), historically serving essential workers or non-9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. commuters (three), the consistent ridership demand of their systems' airport lines (three), and their commuter rail system providing one of the only available transit alternatives to driving in the area (one).

Systems Have Relied on Funding Sources Other than Fares and Reported Higher Operating Costs Compared to Pre-Pandemic

To Account for Substantial Drops in Fare Revenue, the Majority of Systems Have Used More Federal and Other Sources of Funding

Following ridership declines during the COVID-19 pandemic, commuter rail systems experienced substantial losses in fare revenues. Our survey found that the majority of commuter rail systems (26 of 31) reported lower fares and agency generated revenue (fare revenue) in FY 2023 compared to FY 2019.[25] Across all commuter rail systems, nominal fare revenues decreased 31 percent from FY 2019 to FY 2023.[26]

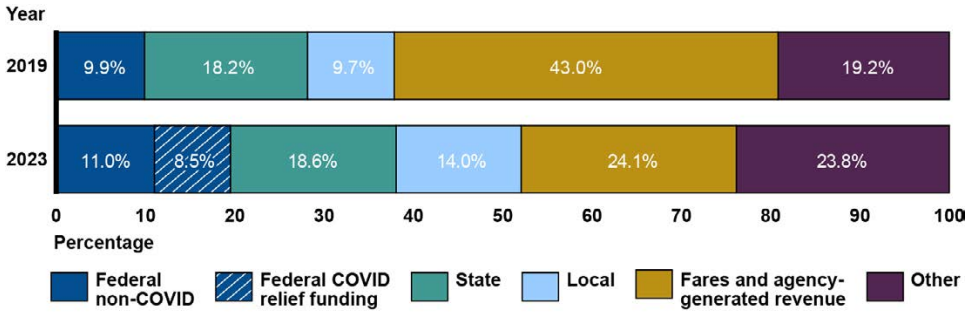
Correspondingly, commuter rail systems reported in our survey that fare revenue made up a smaller percentage of their total funding in FY 2023. Specifically, fare revenue made up almost 43 percent of total funding across all 31 systems in FY 2019 and decreased to 24 percent in FY 2023. To offset reduced fare revenues, the majority of commuter rail systems reported increases in federal, local, or other sources of funding (29 of 31). For example, federal funding as a percentage of systems' total funding roughly doubled, increasing from about 10 percent in FY 2019 to nearly 20 percent in FY 2023, across all systems. COVID-19 relief funding comprised the vast majority of this 9.6 percentage increase (see fig. 6).[27]

[25]Passenger fares make up most of transit agency generated revenue, according to the Congressional Budget Office and NTD. As such, we refer to fares and agency generated revenue as "fare revenue" throughout this report. See Congressional Budget Office, *Federal Financial Support for Public Transportation* (March 2022); Federal Transit Administration, Office of Budget and Policy, *National Transit Summaries and Trends 2023 Edition* (2024).

[26]This sum reflects changes in fare revenues and agency generated revenues as reported in our survey. After adjusting for inflation, fare revenue decreased 41 percent across all 31 systems.

[27]As noted above, CARES Act and CRRSAA funding have no deadline by which the funds must be used, but ARPA funding must be disbursed by September 30, 2029.

Figure 6: Commuter Rail Systems' Total Funding by Source, Fiscal Years 2019, 2023



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Other funding can include funding from fees paid to use existing track, sale of assets, parking fees, or other sources.

However, not all systems receive all types of funding or reflect these industry trends. For example, in FY 2019 and FY 2023, TEXRail did not receive any state funding, and SunRail (in Florida) did not receive local funding. In addition, while industry-wide state funding increased slightly, for VRE, state funding increased from 30 percent to 50 percent of its total funding. Comparatively, for Rail Runner Express (in New Mexico), state funding made up 22 percent of its total funding in FY 2019, but it did not have any state funding in FY 2023. When looking at local funding, northern California's Altamont Corridor Express's local funding decreased from 24 to 16 percent of its total. Comparatively, A-Train received the majority of its funding from local sources—87 and 96 percent in FY 2019 and FY 2023, respectively.

All systems have benefitted from COVID-19 relief funding, but this funding is temporary. Slightly more than half of systems (17) reported in our survey they were still using federal COVID-19 relief funding in FY 2023.[28] Officials we interviewed from one system with COVID-19 relief funds remaining explained they are using that funding to continue to cover operational costs in light of fare revenue remaining below pre-pandemic levels. Officials from another system told us they are using $30 million of COVID-19 relief funding for this same purpose, and that it allowed them to continue to operate. In February 2025, we asked transit agencies if they had used all COVID-19 funding available for their commuter rail

[28]The remaining 14 of the 31 surveyed systems reported not using any COVID-19 relief funding in 2023, though some or all of these systems may have already spent all their COVID-19 relief funding.

systems. Of the 22 who responded as of February 2025, 15 said they had spent all of the available funding.[29]

As transit agencies spend remaining COVID-19 relief funding, officials are looking to other sources to offset fare revenue reductions. Officials from one system that ran out of COVID-19 funding said they are considering raising fares to help fill the resulting budget shortfall. However, raising fares could reduce ridership, so whether this strategy will succeed remains unclear. Officials from most (eight of 10) of the systems we interviewed said that they plan to seek funding from sources other than the federal government in the future.

Stakeholders Most Frequently Attributed Higher Operating Costs to Inflation or Labor or Material Cost Increases

Operating costs have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to our survey and analysis of NTD data. First, the majority (28 of 31) of commuter rail systems reported in our survey that operating costs increased from FY 2019 to FY 2023. Across all 31 systems, operating costs increased about 28 percent in nominal terms, and 9 percent after adjusting for inflation.[30] Second, NTD data show increases in commuter rail systems' operating costs across multiple metrics that account for differences in systems' ridership. Specifically:

- **Fare recovery ratio.** Fare recovery ratio measures how much of a commuter rail system's operating costs are covered by its fare revenue. For the 19 commuter rail systems with complete NTD data, the fare recovery ratio decreased from FY 2019 to FY 2023, ranging from a decrease of 14.9 percent to 82.2 percent.[31] Since fare revenues are directly related to ridership, declines in ridership lead to decreases in fares and the fare recovery ratio. Similarly, the fare recovery ratio decreases if operating costs increase.
- **Operating costs per passenger trip.** Operating costs per passenger trip measures the average operating cost for each passenger that

[29]One of the 15 systems reported it had spent the majority of its COVID-19 relief funding, but a few capital items needed to be closed out.

[30]We have previously reported that commuter rail has high operating costs compared to other transit modes because commuter rail must maintain and manage more infrastructure and equipment. See GAO-21-355R.

[31]While all transit agencies are required to report these metrics to NTD, we excluded data for 12 of the 31 transit agencies with data that FTA identified as "questionable" in NTD, leaving 19 commuter rail systems in our analysis. Of these 19, ridership at four was near or above pre-pandemic levels and ridership at 15 was below. Our survey requested operating and capital cost data from commuter rail systems but did not ask about the NTD metrics.

boards a commuter rail system. For the 19 commuter rail systems with complete NTD data, operating costs per passenger trip increased from FY 2019 to FY 2023 and, when adjusted for inflation, range from an increase of 6.8 percent to 407.3 percent.[32] As a ratio of operating costs to passenger trips, this measure of operating costs increases if total operating expenses increase or ridership falls.

- **Operating costs per passenger mile traveled.** Operating costs per passenger mile traveled measures the average operating cost for each system to carry one passenger one mile. For the 19 commuter rail systems with complete NTD data, operating costs per passenger mile traveled increased from FY 2019 to FY 2023, ranging from an increase of 0.3 percent to 340.1 percent when adjusted for inflation. As a ratio of operating costs to passenger miles traveled, this measure increases if operating costs increase, if passengers travel shorter distances on their trip, or if there are fewer passengers taking trips. The length of a system may affect the distance that passengers travel.[33] For example, the Westside Express Service in Oregon is a relatively short system, meaning passengers are generally traveling fewer miles compared to a longer system like FrontRunner in Utah. As such, Westside Express Service's operating costs per passenger mile traveled in FY 2023—around $11 per passenger mile traveled—were higher than Frontrunner's, which were around $0.60.

Officials from our 10 selected systems most frequently cited inflation as the reason operating costs increased. Specifically, officials from five systems attributed total operating cost increases primarily to inflation. Officials from three of these systems added that inflation since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic had increased operating costs more than anticipated. Inflation, measured by the gross domestic product price index, increased about 17 percent throughout the U.S. economy from FY 2019 to FY 2023. However, after adjusting for inflation, real operating costs across all 31 commuter rail systems from FY 2019 to FY 2023 still increased 9 percent, as noted above.

Beyond inflation, officials from four of our selected systems cited labor costs or the increased cost of materials, which they linked to supply chain issues, as reasons for increased operating costs. Officials from three of

[32]We adjusted the NTD metrics of operating costs per passenger trip and operating costs per passenger mile traveled for inflation because NTD only publishes nominal data.

[33]While the number of riders on a system can also affect the average passenger miles traveled, the length of an overall system is an example of how operating metrics can differ between systems due to unique characteristics of the systems.

the four systems said their labor costs increased due to increases in the price of their labor contracts. Officials from one system also said challenges hiring workers increased their operating costs. With respect to the increased cost of materials, officials from three systems highlighted supply chain issues, which officials from one system said affected their ability to get parts for repairs.

Increased labor and material costs during this time were not unique to commuter rail systems, but rather, were experienced across the transit industry. According to FTA and our previous work, workforce and supply chain challenges increased costs across the transit industry during the pandemic.[34] For example, FTA reported in August 2024 that supply chain shortages and issues have limited the ability of transit agencies to procure vehicles and have led to cancelled contracts, delivery delays, and price increases of up to 70 percent.[35]

Commuter rail system officials we interviewed told us that increased costs are affecting their ability to plan and implement projects for future operations.[36] Officials from four systems said they had to delay or modify capital projects due to increasing costs. Such delays may be challenging to future system operations. According to officials from one system, for example, their system is older, and capital projects are necessary to address the system's infrastructure needs and continue operations. In addition, officials from two commuter rail systems noted that their systems are facing a funding gap. Officials from three systems also said that funding does not go as far to cover project costs. For example, officials from one system told us the transit agency originally had enough money

[34]We have previously reported on transit agency operating and capital cost increases during the COVID-19 pandemic. See GAO, *COVID-19: Federal Efforts Could Be Strengthened by Timely and Concerted Actions*, GAO-20-701 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2020); and *COVID-19: Current and Future Federal Preparedness Requires Fixes to Improve Health Data and Address Improper Payments*, GAO-22-105397 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 27, 2022). See also Federal Transit Administration, *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Transit Ridership and Accessibility*.

[35]Federal Transit Administration, *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Transit Ridership and Accessibility*.

[36]We have previously reported on capital costs, including capital investment grants, and FTA cost estimations, and we have ongoing work on capital costs. See GAO, *Capital Investment Grants Program: Cost Predictions Have Improved, but the Pandemic Complicates Assessing Ridership Predictions*, GAO-23-105479 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 10, 2023); *Capital Investment Grants Program: FTA Should Improve the Effectiveness and Transparency of Its Reviews*, GAO-20-512 (Washington, D.C.: July 16, 2020); and *Rail Transit: Federal Transit Administration Could Improve Information on Estimating Project Costs*, GAO-19-562 (Washington, D.C.: July 22, 2019).

to build a “clean and repair” facility for 13 trains before the pandemic, but with recent cost increases, can only build a facility that holds eight trains. Looking ahead, if costs continue to increase while ridership recovery remains uncertain, many commuter rail systems will likely face ongoing challenges that require further adaptation to continue operating.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOT for review and comment. DOT provided technical comments, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Transportation, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at vonaha@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

//SIGNED//

Andrew Von Ah
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Appendix I: U.S. Commuter Rail System Snapshots

We created "snapshots" for the 31 commuter rail systems operating in the U.S.[1] As part of our web-based survey, we requested and analyzed data from each system, including fiscal year (FY) 2023 funding and cost data, station locations, and FY 2023 passenger boardings by station, if available.[2] Each snapshot includes a map showing the location of that system's stations and the relative population density of its service area. Each snapshot also depicts the funding composition of each system in FY 2019 and FY 2023. Transit agencies' fiscal years may vary (e.g., some are from July through June, while others are from October through September). Finally, we also include information on passenger boardings from January 2019 through December 2024 for each system. To ensure consistency among systems, we used monthly data from the National Transit Database to calculate annual passenger boardings in calendar year 2023 for each snapshot.

[1]The 31 commuter rail systems include all systems in the U.S. classified as commuter rail, as well as certain hybrid rail systems and two legacy Amtrak lines identified as commuter rail systems within the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database.

[2]Five systems could not provide annual passenger boardings at the station level, though the agencies may track boardings at other intervals (e.g., by fare zone).

ACE
California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 10
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 172
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 578,546

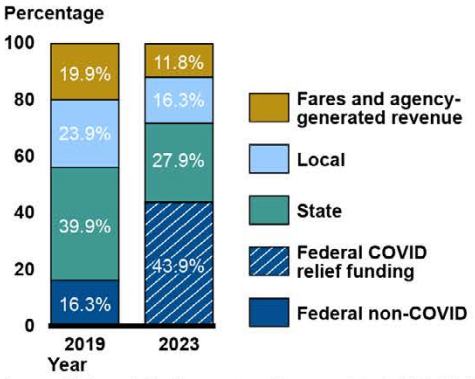
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $10,123,255
- Operating Costs: $32,425,229

System Description

Altamont Corridor Express (ACE), which began operation in 1998, provides service between Stockton and San Jose, California. ACE only operates commuter rail service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, ACE's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 11.9 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, ACE's passenger boardings remained 45.9 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding constituted ACE's largest source of funding (43.9 percent), as compared to state funding in 2019.

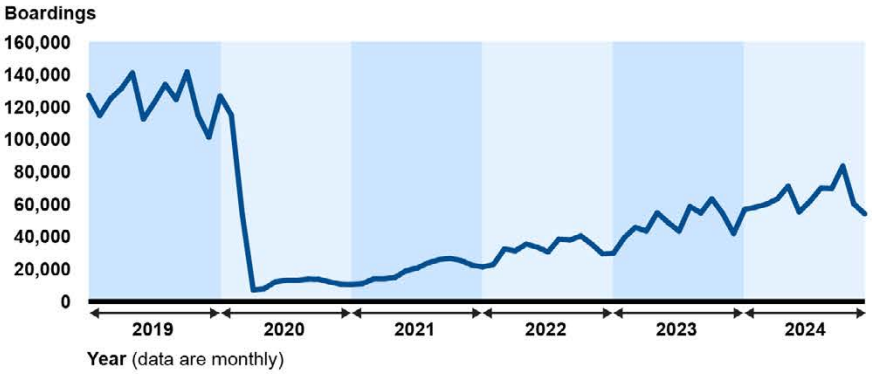
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

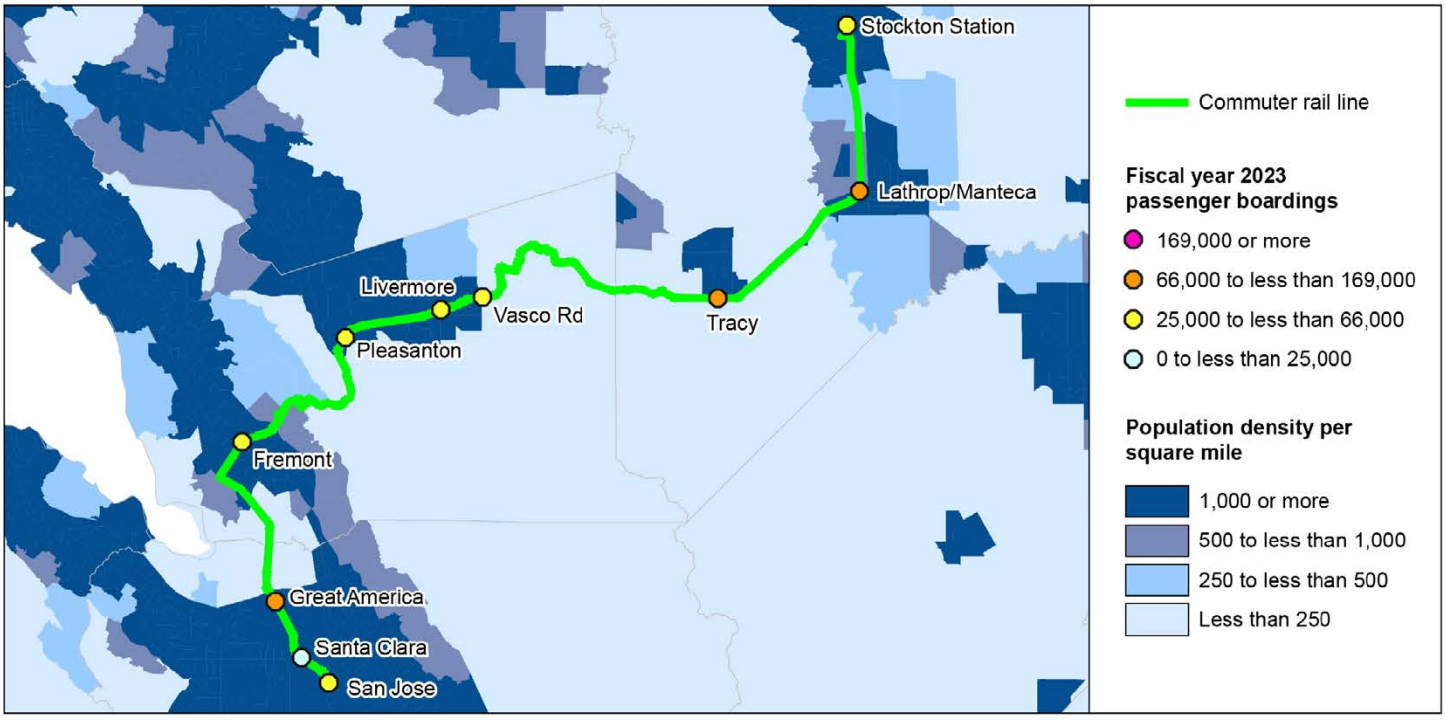
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

A-Train

Texas

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 6
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 42.6
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 234,540

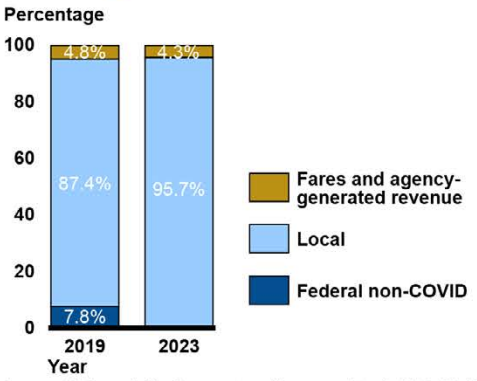
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $1,750,767
- Operating Costs: $24,762,620

System Description

A-Train, which began operation in 2011 by the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), connects multiple cities in Denton County, Texas. In addition to commuter rail, DCTA also operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, A-Train's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 11.5 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, A-Train's passenger boardings remained 25.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted A-Train's largest source of funding (95.7 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, A-Train did not use any federal funding, including COVID-19 relief funding.

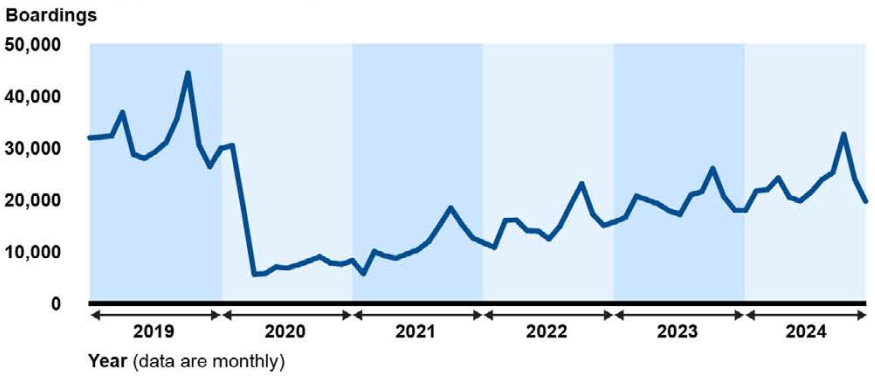
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Caltrain

California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 31
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 154.6
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 7,259,392

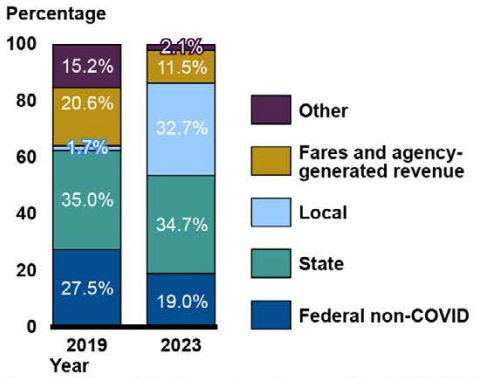
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $90,956,662
- Operating Costs: $179,192,330

System Description

Caltrain, which began operation in 1992 by the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, connects San Francisco, San Jose, and Gilroy, California. Caltrain only operates commuter rail service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Caltrain's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 26.8 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Caltrain's passenger boardings remained 44.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted Caltrain's largest source of funding (34.7 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, fare revenue dropped and local funding increased significantly to 32.7 percent of Caltrain's total funding.

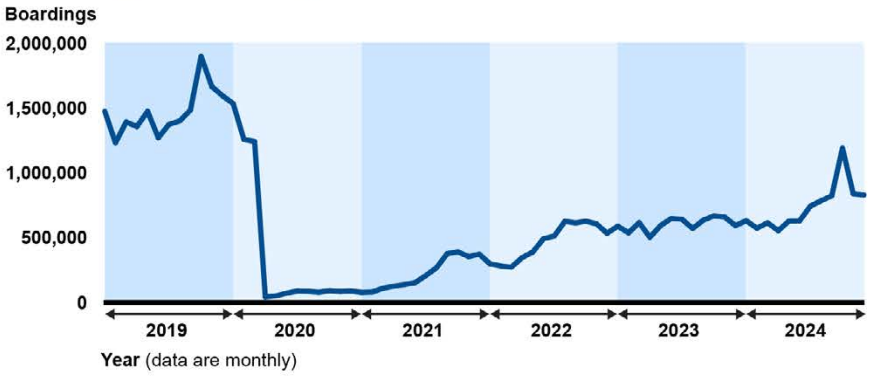
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

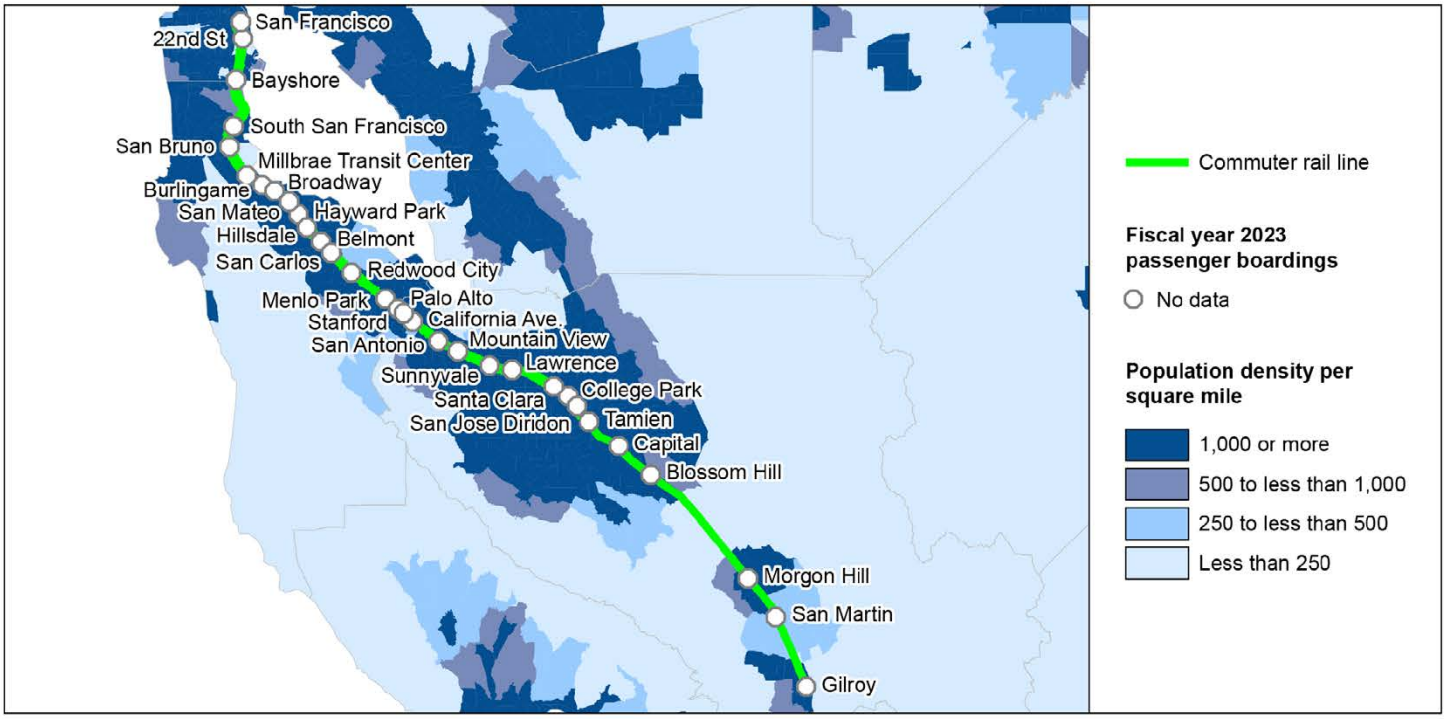
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

COASTER

California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 8
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 82.2
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 841,690

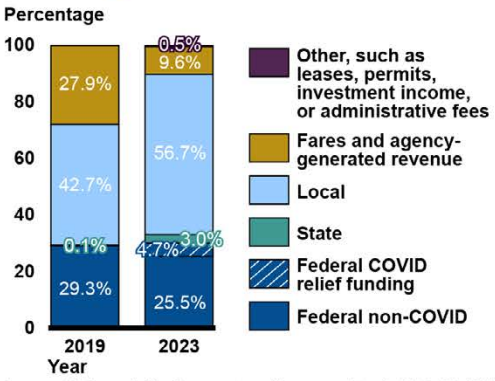
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $16,200,000
- Operating Costs: $36,042,932

System Description

COASTER, which began operation in 1995 by the North County Transit District, provides service to multiple cities in San Diego County, California. North County Transit District also operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and the SPRINTER commuter rail system. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, COASTER's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 7.8 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, COASTER's passenger boardings remained 32.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted COASTER's largest source of funding (56.7 percent), similar to 2019.

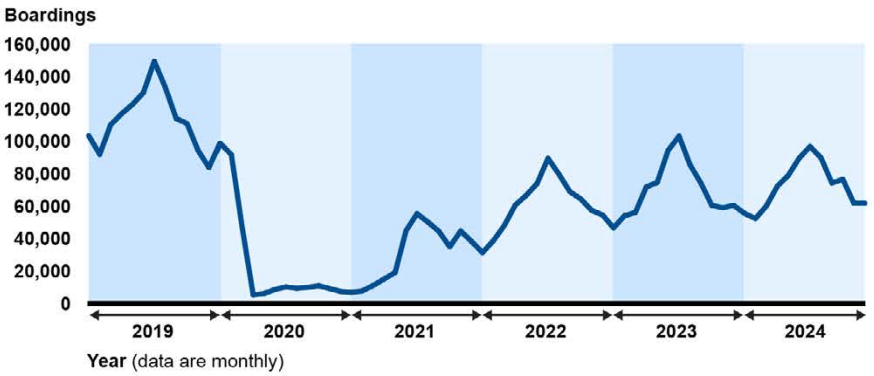
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

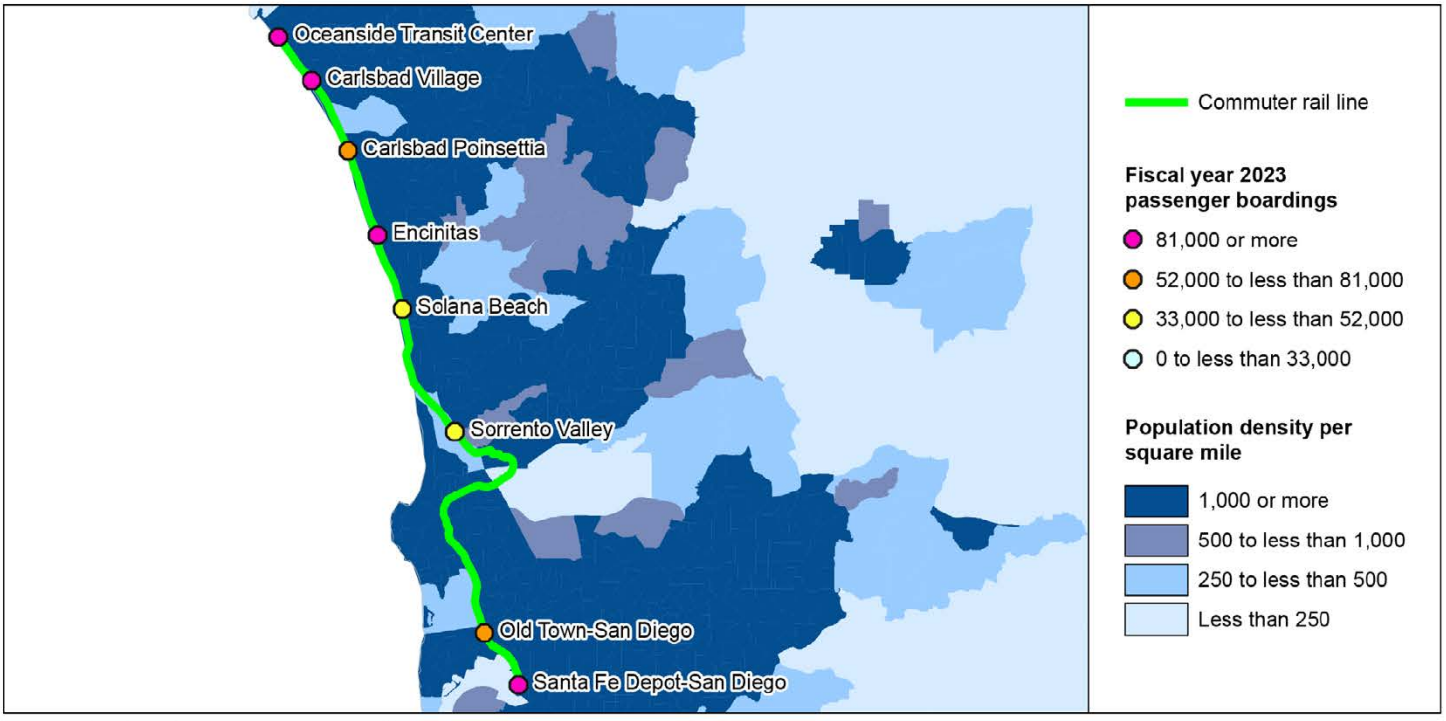
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Denver RTD

Colorado

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 22
- Number of Lines: 4
- Total Directional Route Miles: 70.6
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 8,578,271

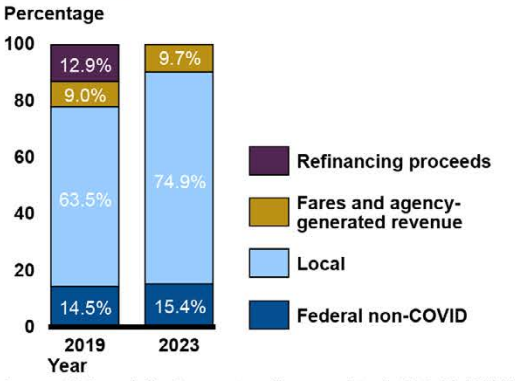
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $0
- Operating Costs: $111,749,003

System Description

Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD), which began operation in 2016 by the RTD, connects multiple cities to Denver, Colorado. In addition to commuter rail, RTD also operates light rail, fixed route bus, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Denver RTD's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 49.3 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Denver RTD's passenger boardings remained 23.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted Denver RTD's largest source of funding (74.9 percent), similar to 2019.

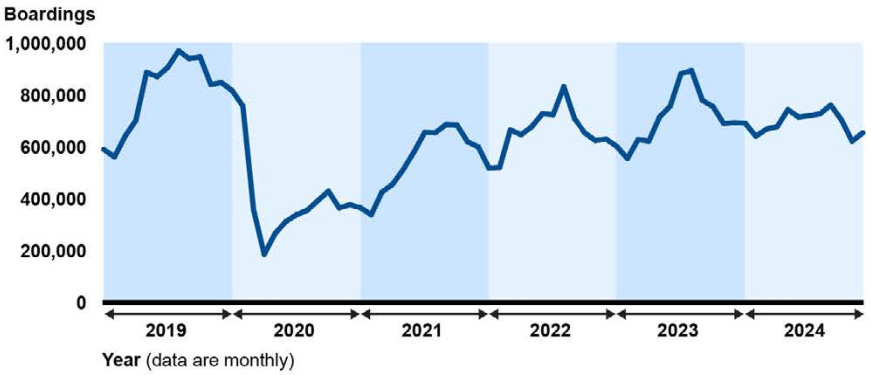
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

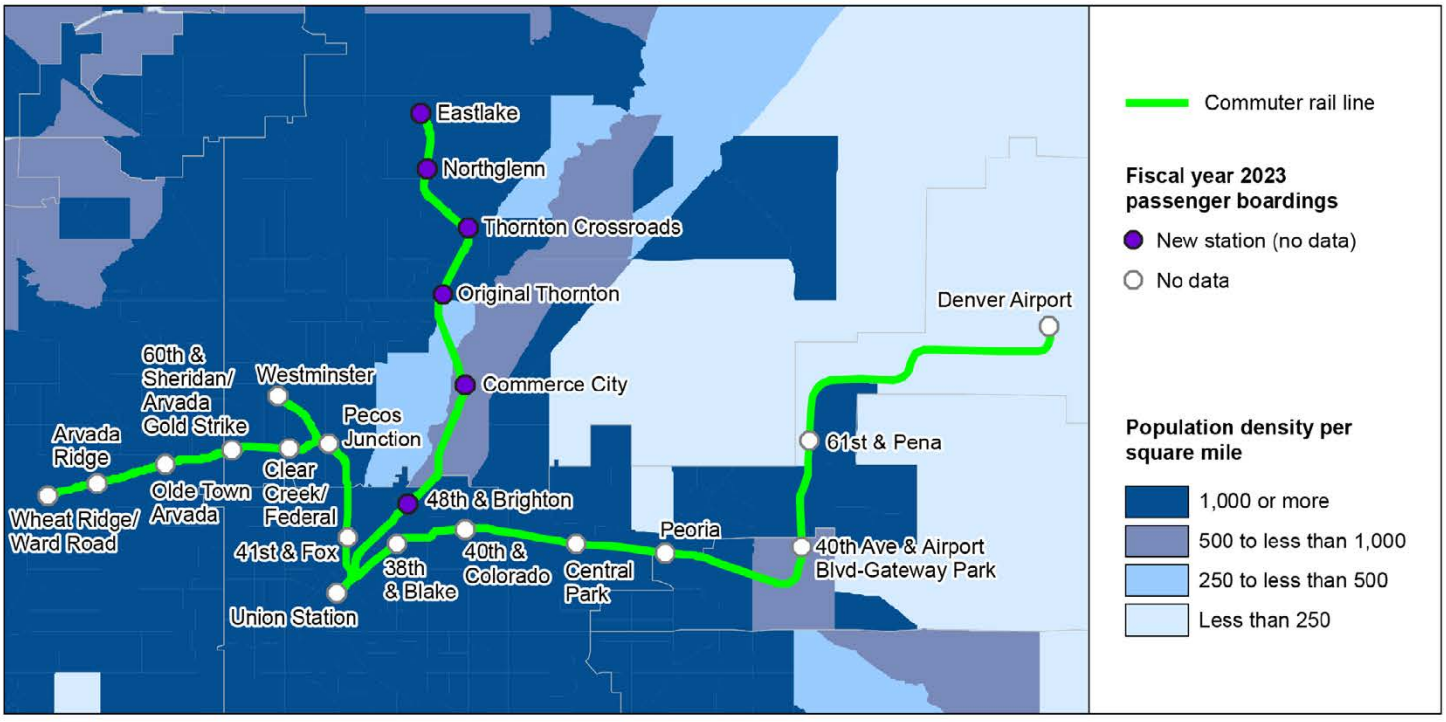
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Downeaster

Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 12
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 287.6
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 558,502

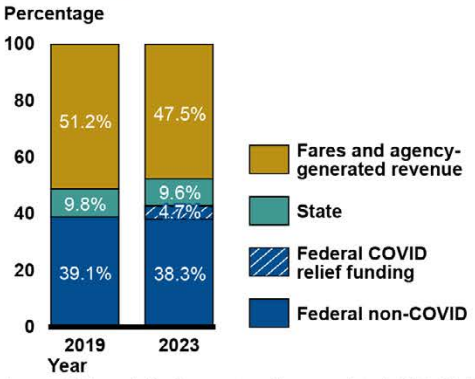
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $0
- Operating Costs: $26,261,505

System Description

Downeaster, which began operation in 2001 by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority and is operated by Amtrak, connects multiple cities in Maine and New Hampshire to Boston, Massachusetts. Downeaster only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in November 2024, Downeaster's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 9.6 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Downeaster's passenger boardings were 0.7 percent above pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, fares and agency-generated revenue constituted Downeaster's largest source of funding (47.5 percent), similar to 2019.

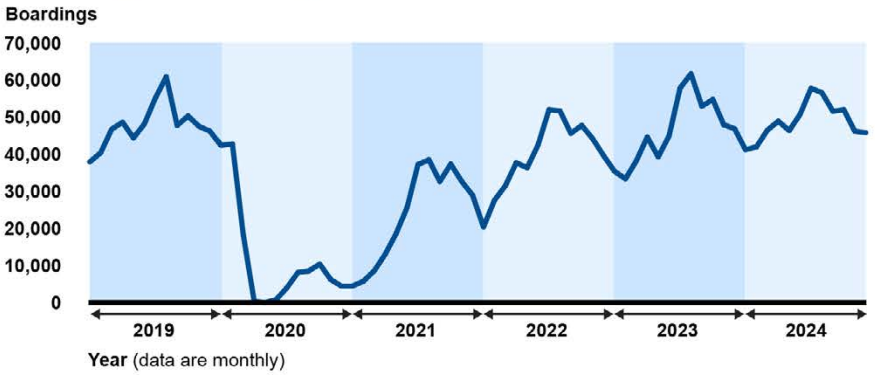
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

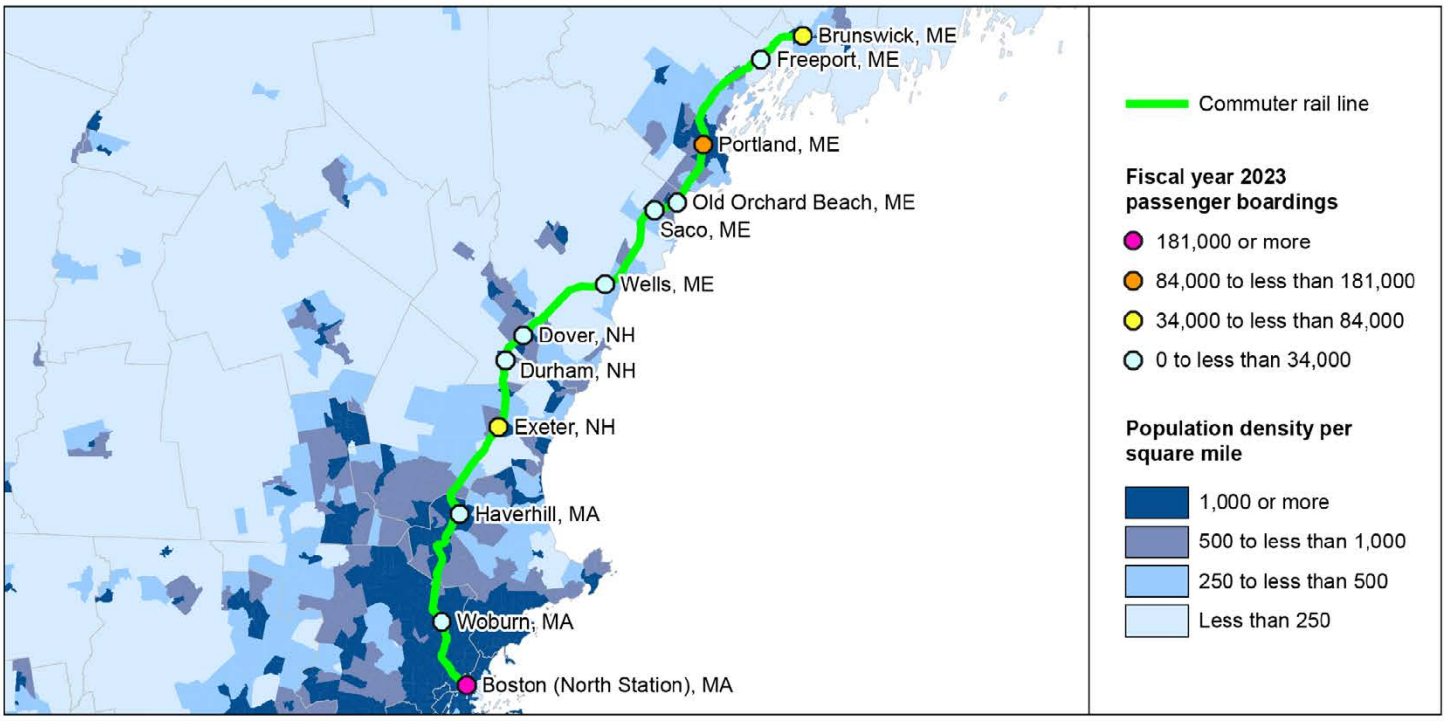
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

FrontRunner

Utah

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 16
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 83
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 3,736,620

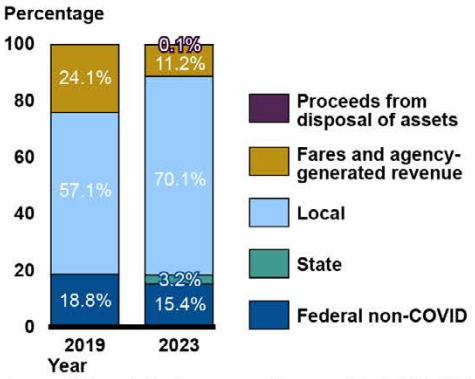
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $10,052,211
- Operating Costs: $47,950,909

System Description

FrontRunner, which began operation in 2008 by the Utah Transit Authority, connects Provo and Ogden to Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition to commuter rail, the Utah Transit Authority also operates heavy rail, light rail, fixed route bus, bus rapid transit, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, FrontRunner's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 13.8 percent below 2019 service levels from the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, FrontRunner's passenger boardings remained 20.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted FrontRunner's largest source of funding (70.1 percent), similar to 2019.

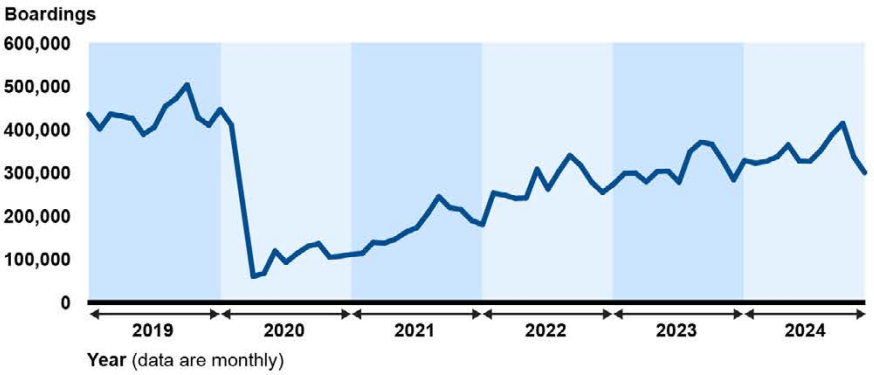
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

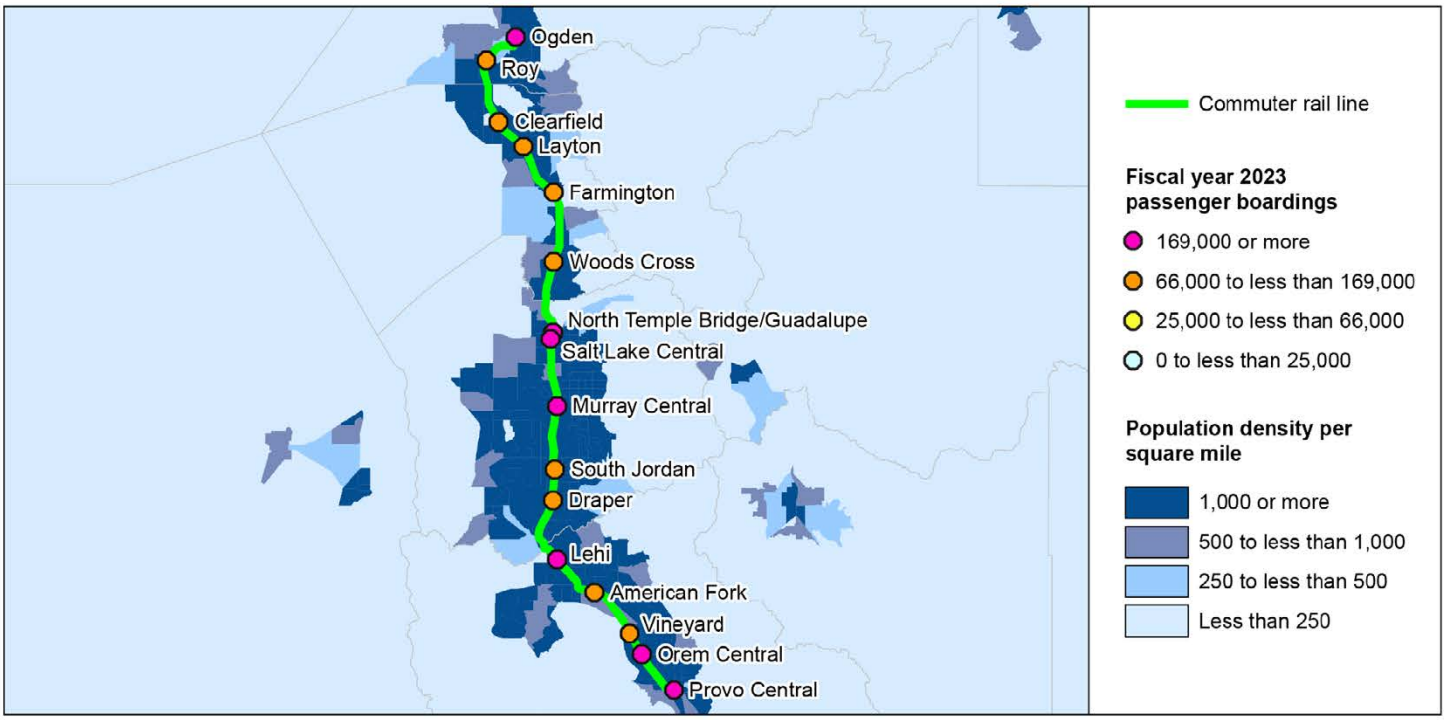
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Keystone Line

Pennsylvania and New York

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 21
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 144.4
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 587,778

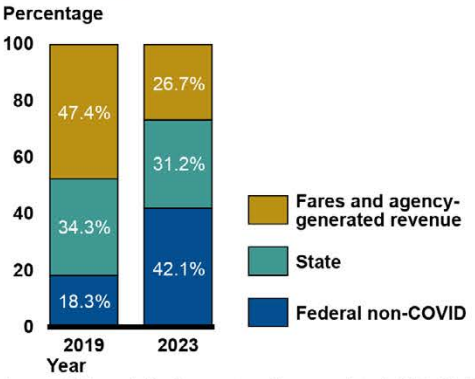
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $52,842,533
- Operating Costs: $55,530,860

System Description

The Keystone Line, which began operation in 1972 with support from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and is operated by Amtrak, connects Harrisburg to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and New York City, New York. The Keystone Line only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in October 2024, the Keystone Line's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 40.3 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, the Keystone Line's passenger boardings remained 21.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, federal non-COVID-19 relief funding constituted the Keystone Line's largest source of funding (42.1 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019.

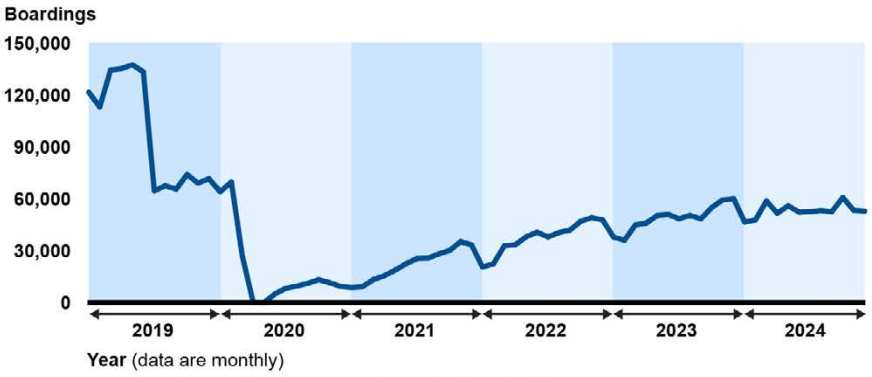
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Long Island Rail Road

New York

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 126
- Number of Lines: 12
- Total Directional Route Miles: 323
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 83,835,706

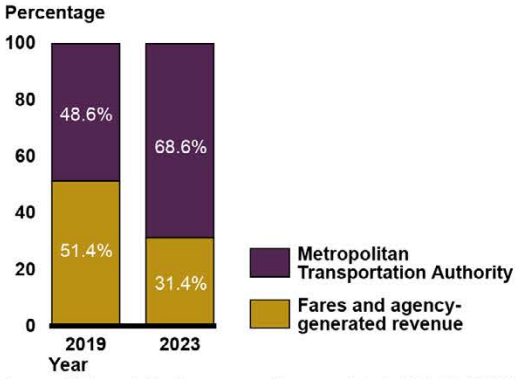
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $1,071,895,437
- Operating Costs: $2,135,218,700

System Description

The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), which was chartered in 1834 and is now operated as a subsidiary of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, connects New York City to Long Island, New York. The LIRR only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, the LIRR's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 18.4 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, LIRR's passenger boardings remained 28.5 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority constituted LIRR's largest source of funding (68.6 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019.

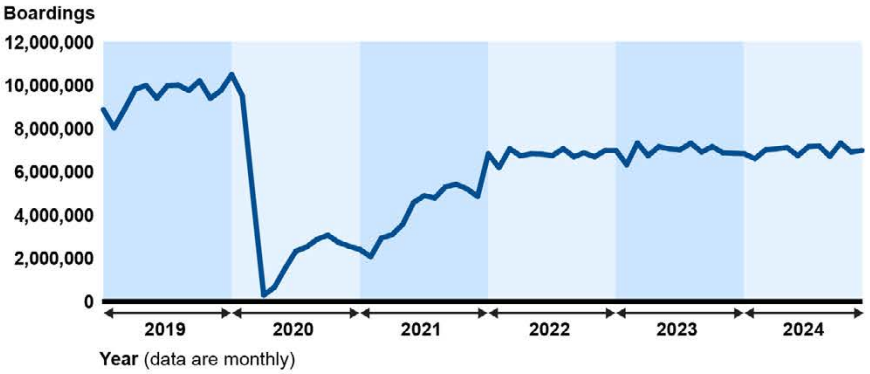
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

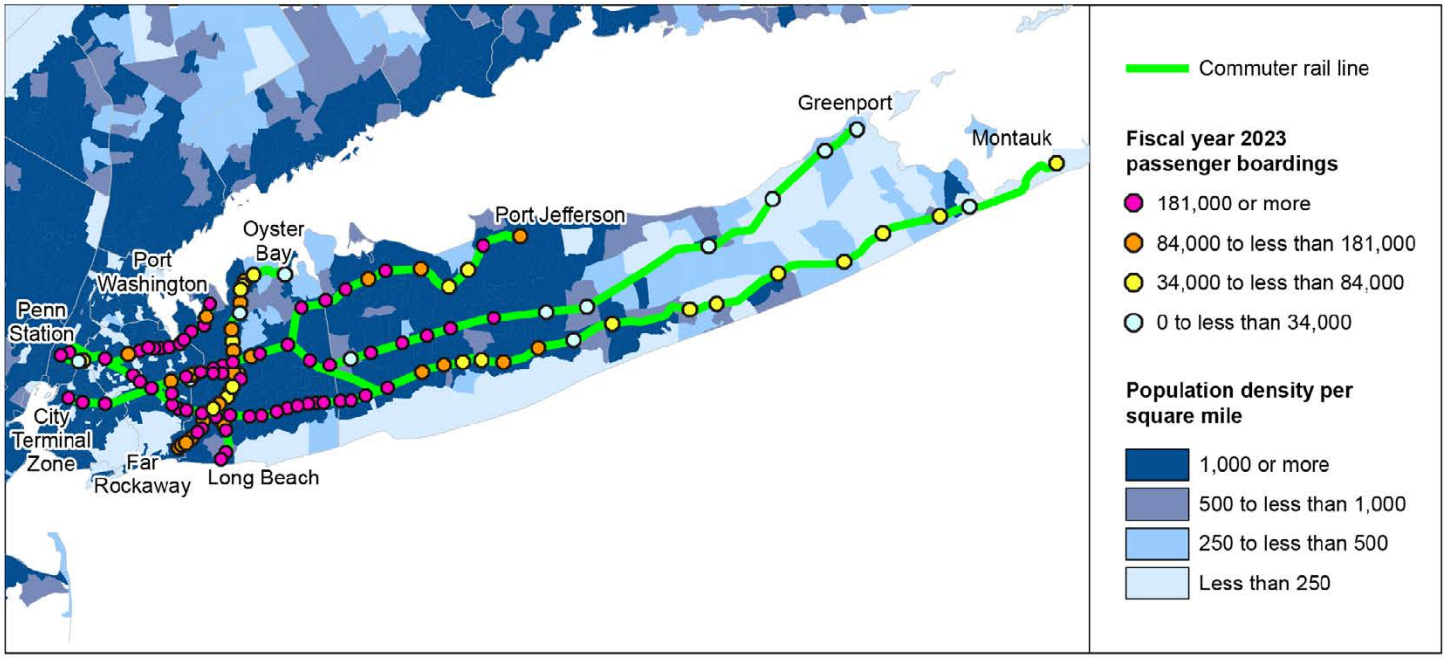
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

MARC

Maryland, Washington, D.C., and West Virginia

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 42
- Number of Lines: 3
- Total Directional Route Miles: 197.7
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 3,681,266

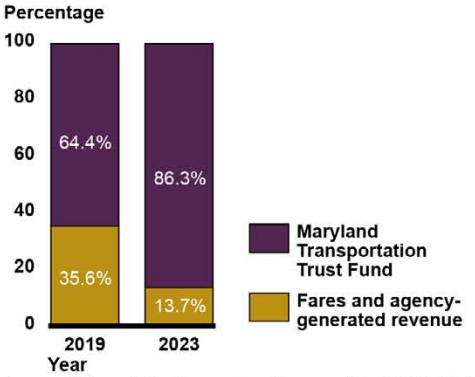
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $28,818,196
- Operating Costs: $155,364,835

System Description

The Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) train, which began operation in 1983 by the Maryland Transit Administration, connects multiple cities such as Martinsburg, West Virginia, Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. In addition to commuter rail, the Maryland Transit Administration operates heavy rail, light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, the MARC's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 2.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, the MARC's passenger boardings remained 62.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, the Maryland Transportation Trust Fund constituted MARC's largest source of funding (86.3 percent), similar to 2019.

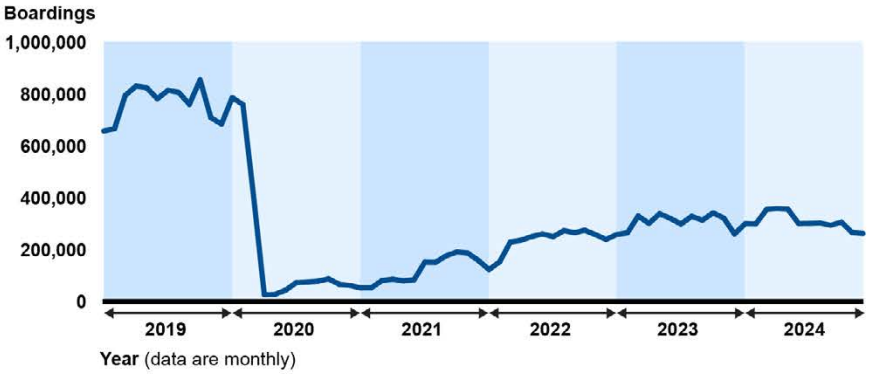
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

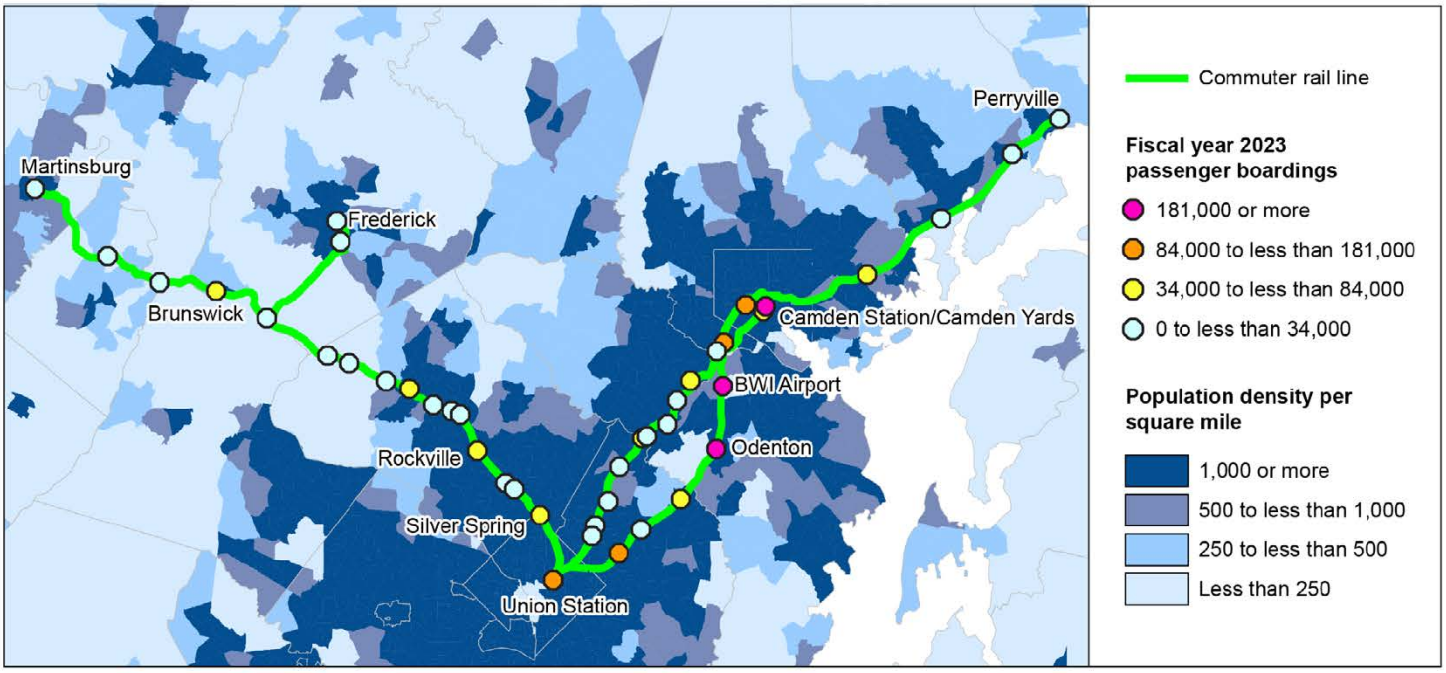
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

MBTA

Massachusetts

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 137
- Number of Lines: 14
- Total Directional Route Miles: 776.1
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 26,443,813

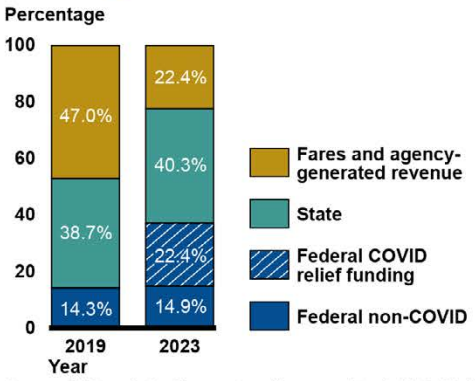
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $350,000,000
- Operating Costs: $400,000,000

System Description

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Commuter Rail, which began operation in 1964, connects multiple cities to Boston, Massachusetts. In addition to commuter rail, the MBTA operates heavy rail, light rail, fixed route bus, bus rapid transit, paratransit, and ferry. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, MBTA Commuter Rail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 10.9 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, MBTA Commuter Rail's passenger boardings remained 3.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted MBTA Commuter Rail's largest source of funding (40.3 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 22.4 percent of MBTA Commuter Rail's total funding.

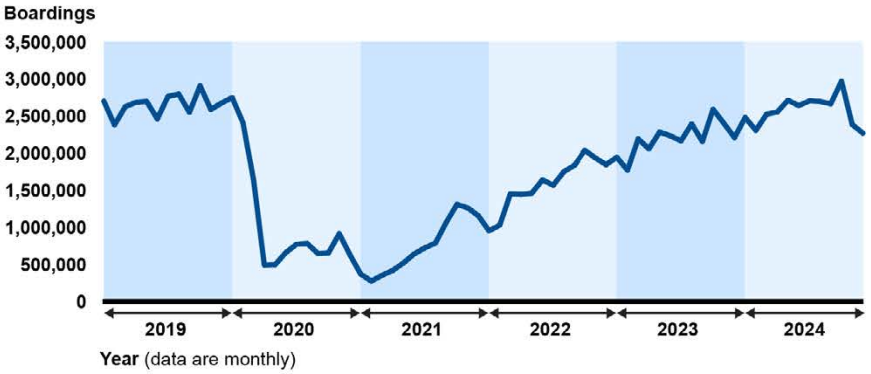
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

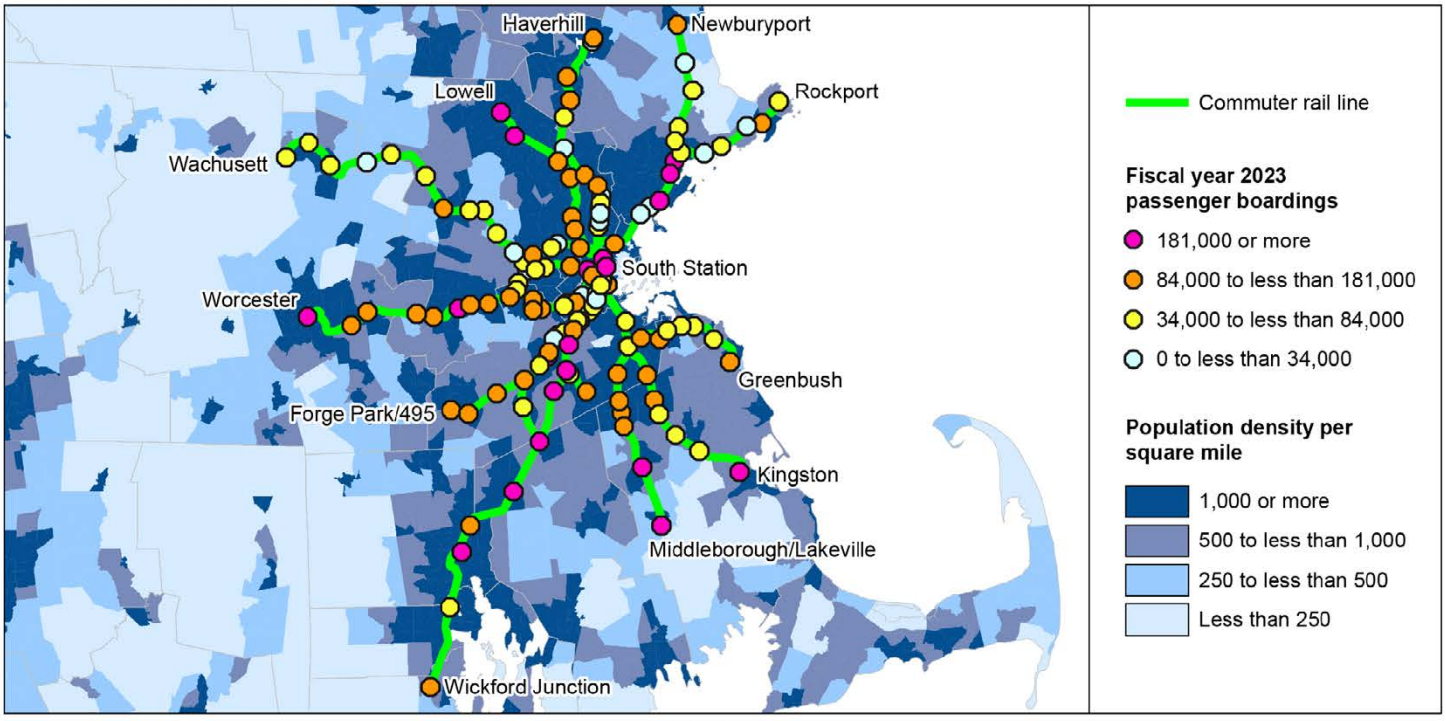
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Metra

Illinois

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 243
- Number of Lines: 11
- Total Directional Route Miles: 975
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 31,988,076

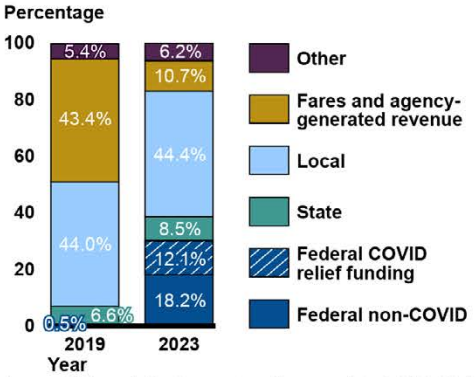
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $346,474,222
- Operating Costs: $911,755,439

System Description

Metra, which began operation in 1983 by the Commuter Rail Division of the Regional Transportation Authority and its operating corporation, Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Rail Corporation, connects multiple cities to Chicago, Illinois. The Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Rail Corporation only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metra's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 0.3 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metra's passenger boardings remained 42.4 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted Metra's largest source of funding (44.4 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, fares and agency-generated revenues as a percentage of total funding dropped, while federal funding–including COVID-19 relief and non-COVID-19 relief funding–increased to 30.3 percent of Metra's total funding.

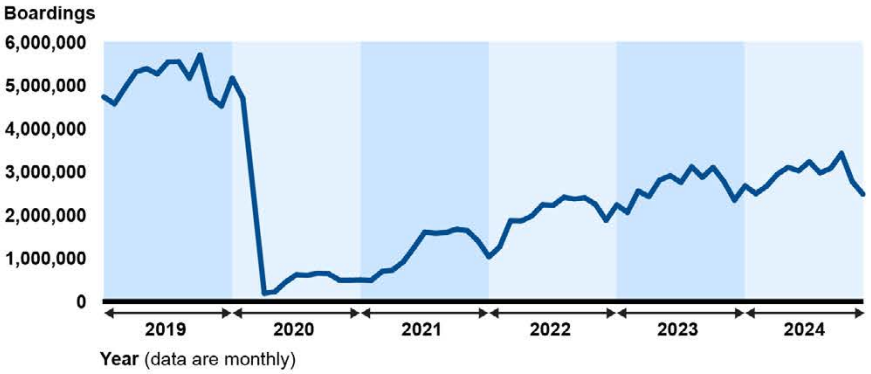
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

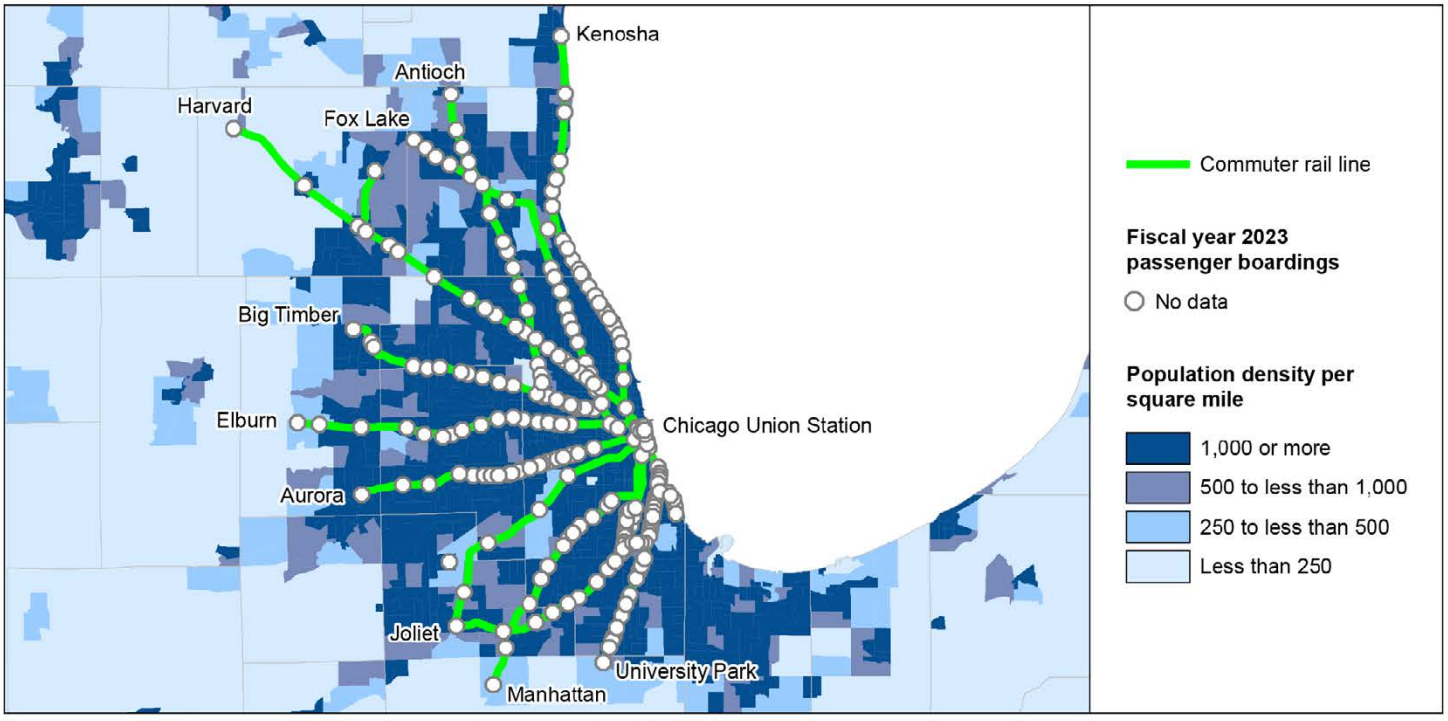
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Metrolink

California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 67
- Number of Lines: 8
- Total Directional Route Miles: 555
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 4,126,303

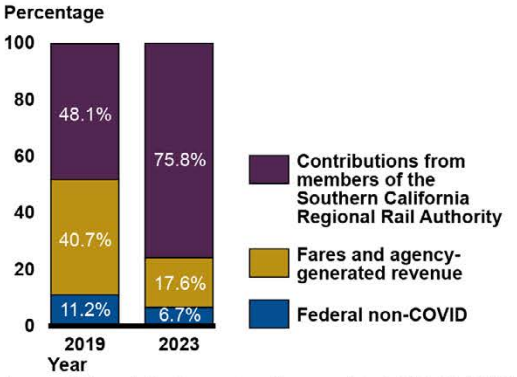
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $84,526,633
- Operating Costs: $273,217,165

System Description

Metrolink, which began operation in 1992 by the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, connects six counties throughout Southern California. Metrolink only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metrolink's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 4.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metrolink's passenger boardings remained 51.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, fares and agency-generated revenue dropped, while contributions from the member agencies of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority constituted Metrolink's largest source of funding (75.8 percent), similar to 2019.

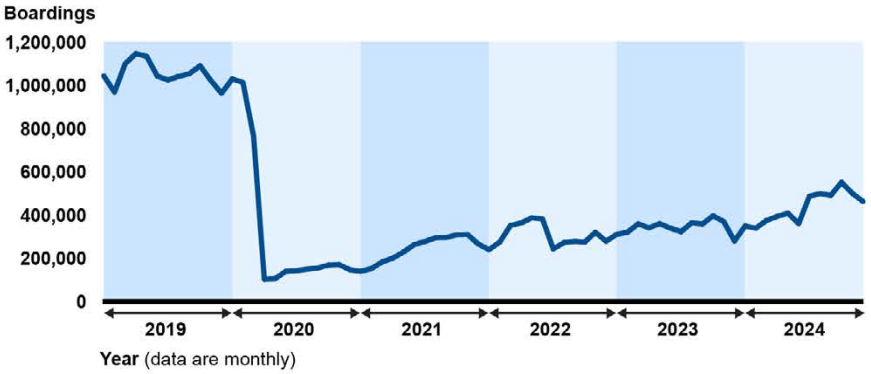
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

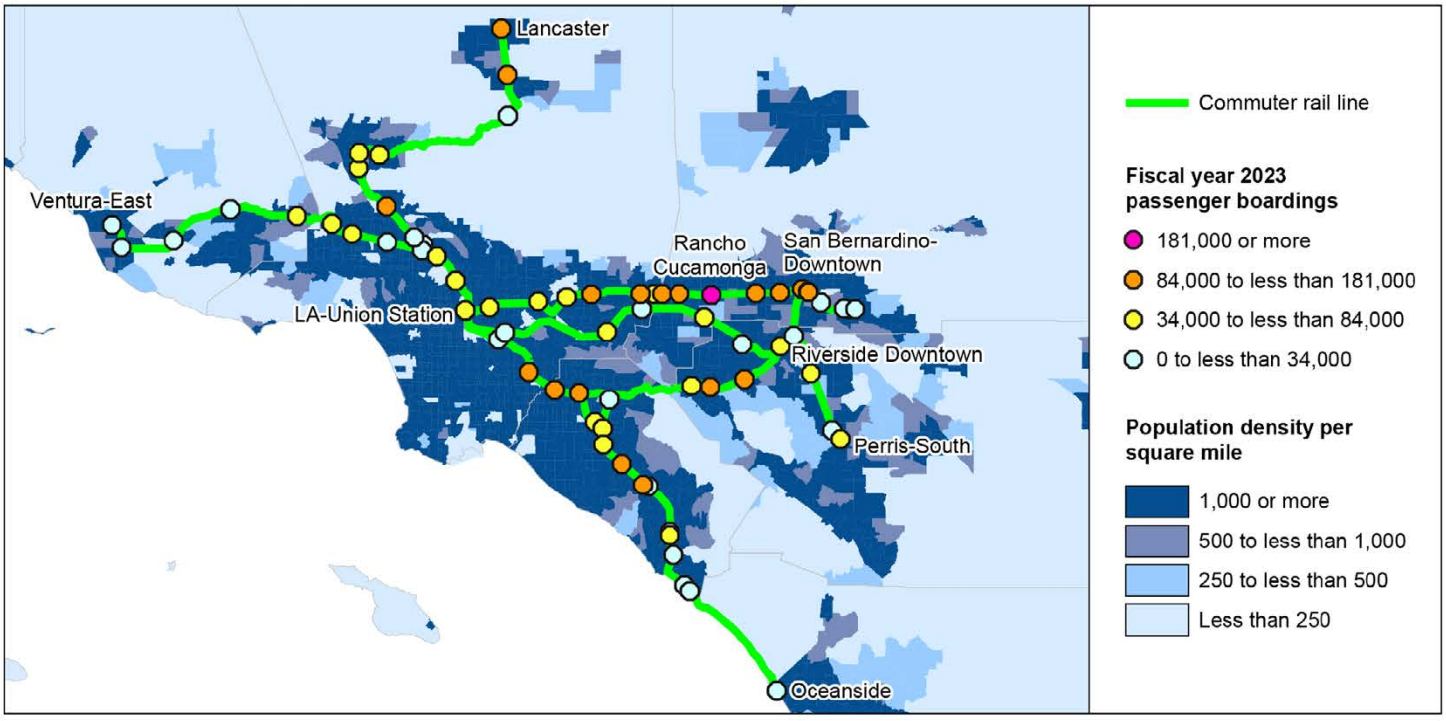
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Metro-North

New York

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 123
- Number of Lines: 5
- Total Directional Route Miles: 545.7
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 66,366,290

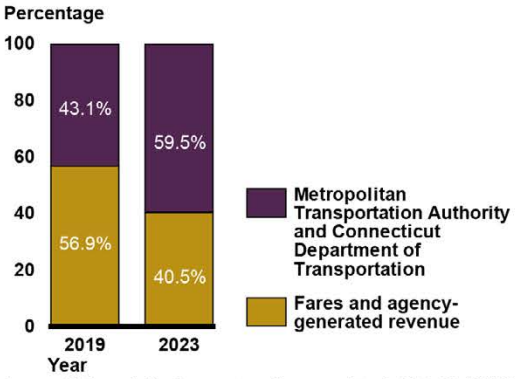
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $789,180,013
- Operating Costs: $1,613,848,878

System Description

Metro-North, which began operation in 1983 and is a subsidiary of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), connects New York City with communities to the northwest, north, and east, including in Connecticut, where it operates commuter rail service under contract for the Connecticut Department of Transportation. In addition to commuter rail, Metro-North also operates fixed route bus and ferry. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metro-North's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 2.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Metro-North's passenger boardings remained 25.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Connecticut Department of Transportation distributions constituted Metro-North's largest source of funding (59.5 percent), compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019.

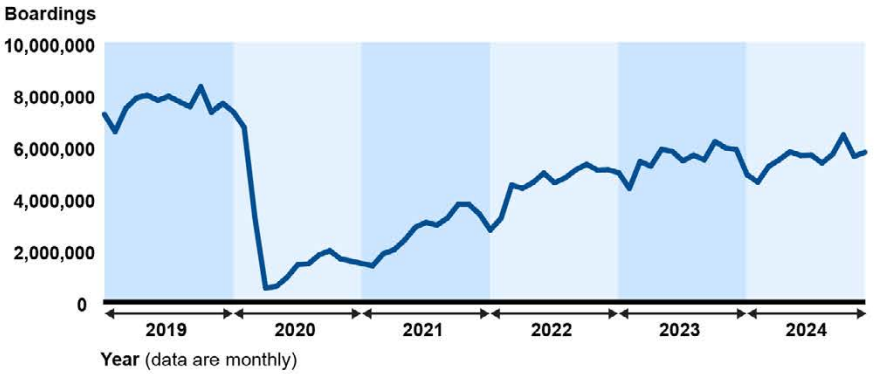
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

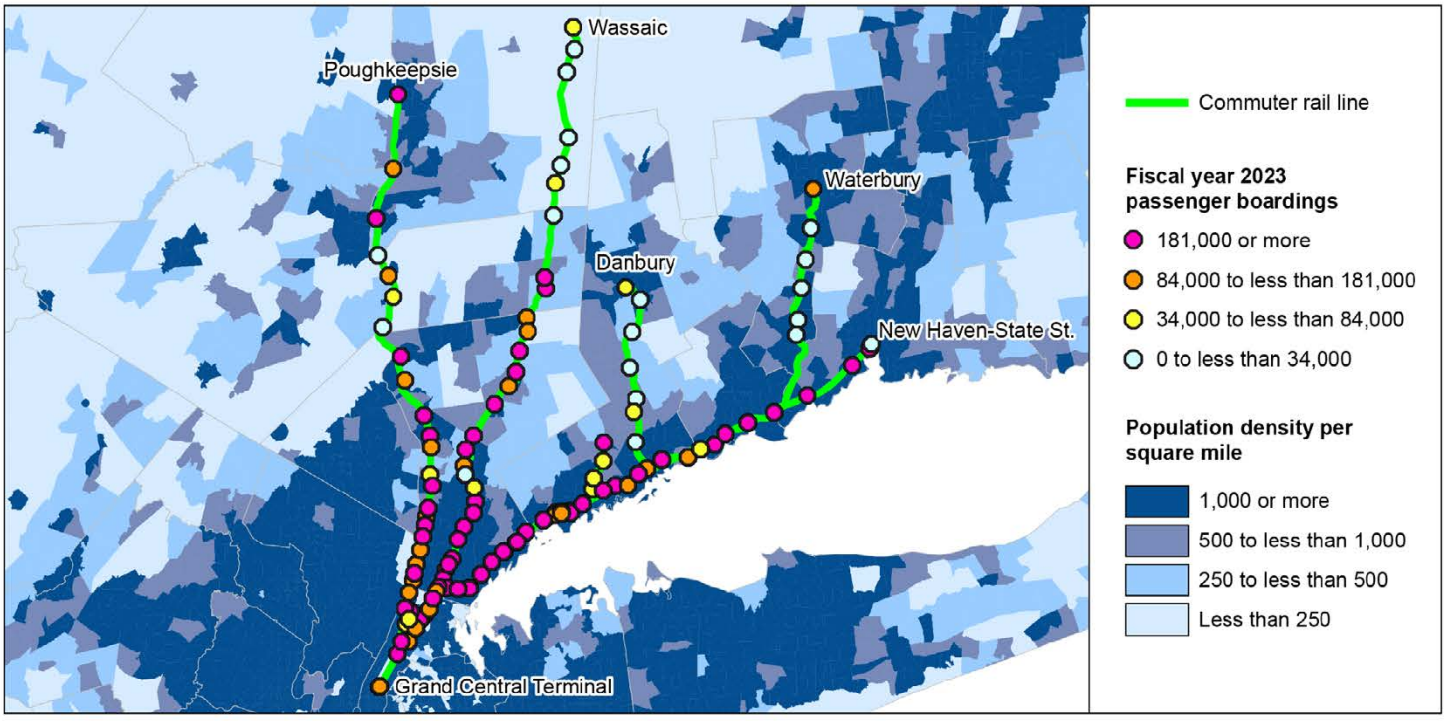
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

MetroRail

Texas

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 10
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 64.2
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 486,036

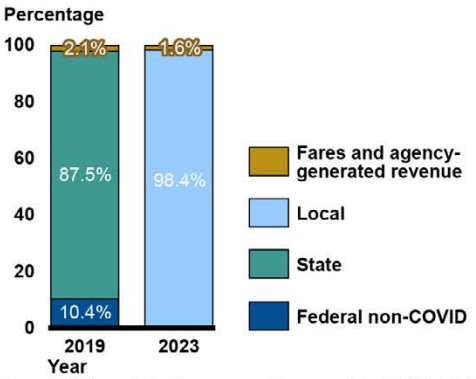
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $45,673,916
- Operating Costs: $34,842,819

System Description

MetroRail, which began operation in 2010 by the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, provides service in and around Austin, Texas. In addition to commuter rail, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority also operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, MetroRail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 38.7 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024 MetroRail's passenger boardings were 5.8 percent above pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted MetroRail's largest source of funding (98.4 percent), as compared to state funding in 2019.

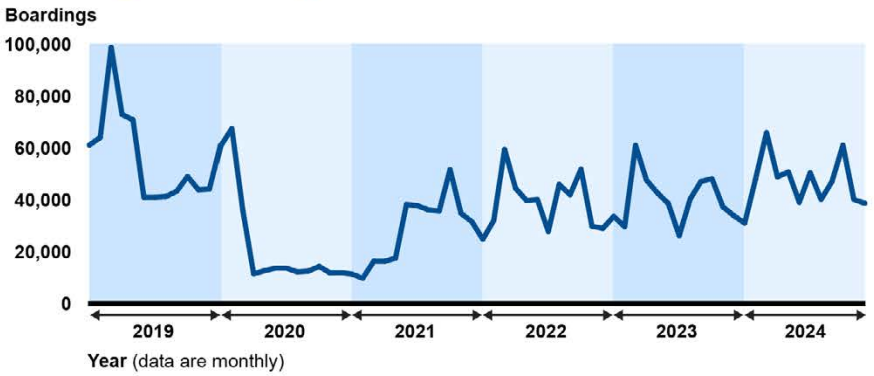
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

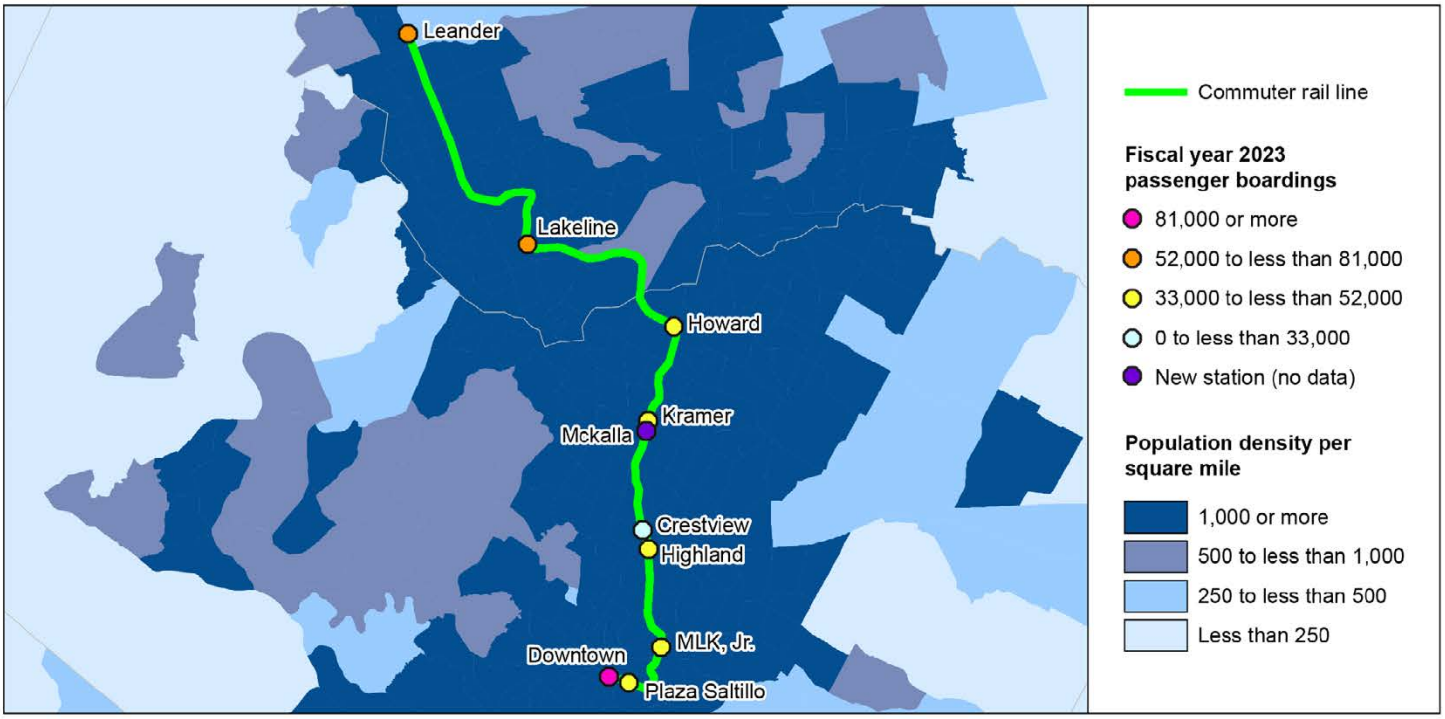
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

NJ TRANSIT

New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 153
- Number of Lines: 12
- Total Directional Route Miles: 920.4
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 58,247,168

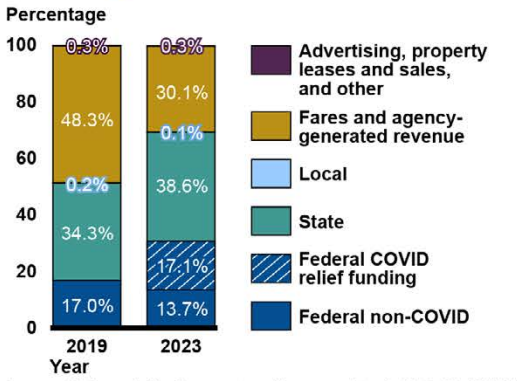
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $1,315,230,000
- Operating Costs: $1,399,394,900

System Description

NJ TRANSIT, which began operation in 1983 by the New Jersey Transit Corporation, primarily connects multiple cities in New Jersey to New York City, New York. In addition to commuter rail, the New Jersey Transit Corporation also operates light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, NJ TRANSIT's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 0.7 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, NJ TRANSIT's passenger boardings remained 32.9 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted NJ Transit's largest source of funding (38.6 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding also made up 17.1 percent of NJ TRANSIT's total funding.

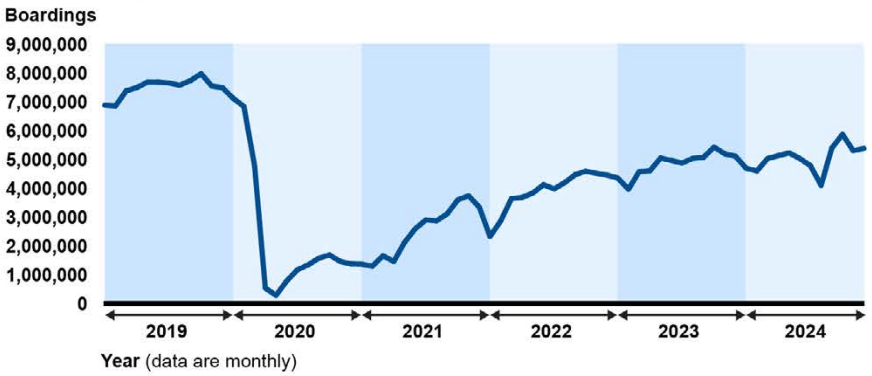
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

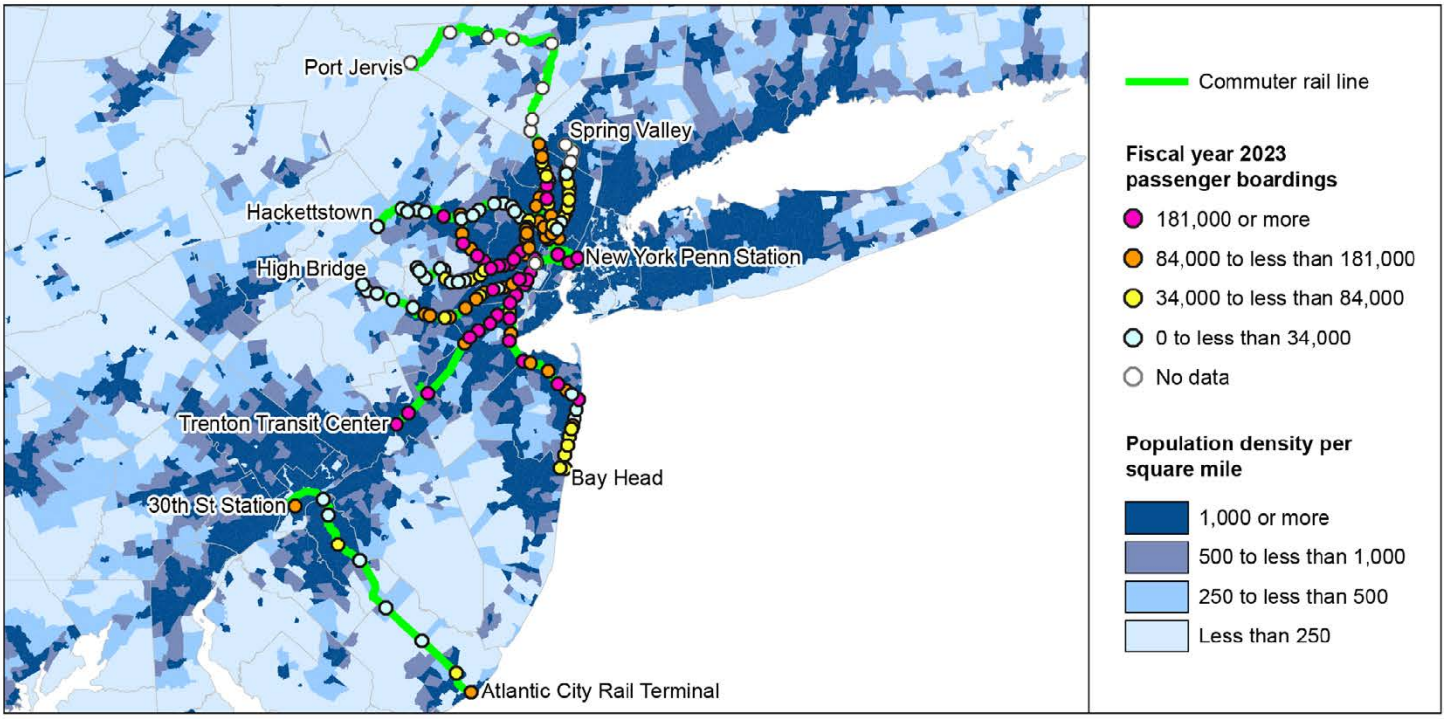
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Northstar

Minnesota

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 7
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 77.9
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 97,265

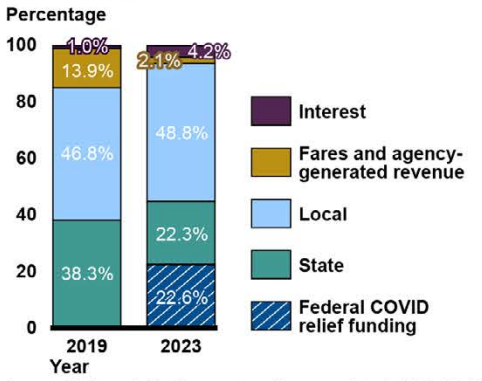
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $11,662,423
- Operating Costs: $6,812,669

System Description

Northstar, which began operation in 2009 by Metro Transit, connects Minneapolis to Big Lake, Minnesota. In addition to commuter rail, Metro Transit also operates light rail, fixed route bus, bus rapid transit, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Northstar's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 50.9 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Northstar's passenger boardings remained 82.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted Northstar's largest source of funding (48.8 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 22.6 percent of Northstar's total funding.

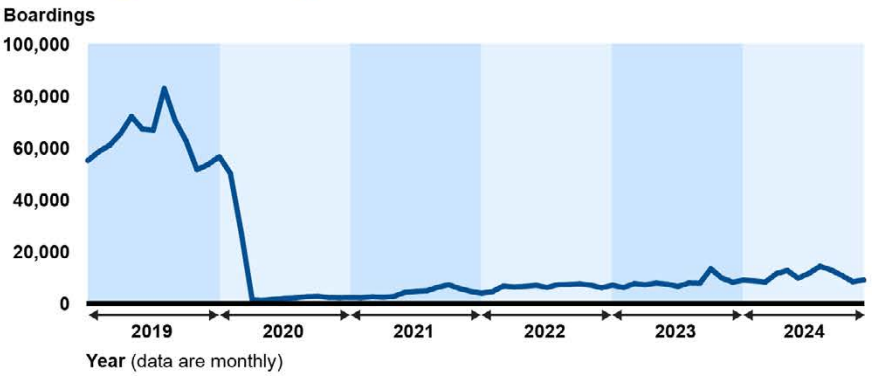
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Rail Runner Express

New Mexico

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 15
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 193.1
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 586,309

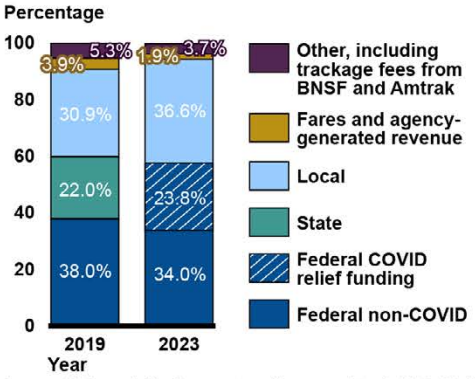
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $102,350
- Operating Costs: $44,384,257

System Description

Rail Runner Express, which began operation in 2006 by the Rio Metro Regional Transit District, connects Albuquerque to Belen and Santa Fe, New Mexico. In addition to commuter rail, Rio Metro Regional Transit District also operates fixed route bus and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Rail Runner Express's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 18.3 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Rail Runner Express's passenger boardings remained 15.9 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted Rail Runner Express's largest source of funding (36.6 percent), as compared to federal non-COVID-19 relief funding in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 23.8 percent of Rail Runner Express's total funding.

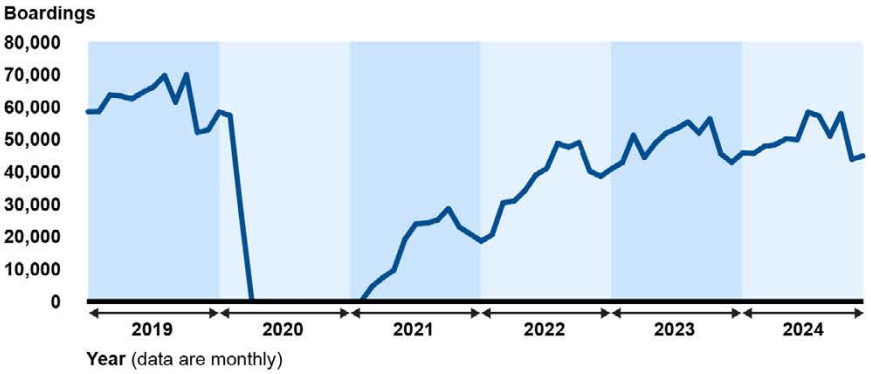
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

SEPTA

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 156
- Number of Lines: 13
- Total Directional Route Miles: 453.02
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 20,449,938

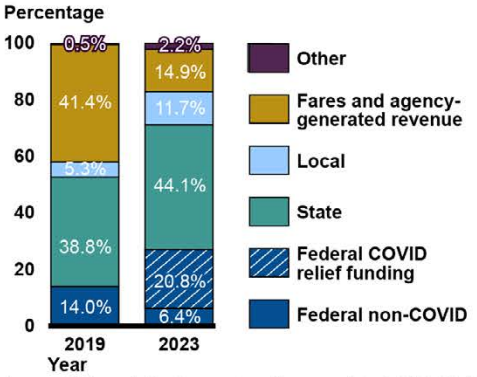
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $220,126,531
- Operating Costs: $379,125,084

System Description

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA), which took over operation of the Regional Rail in 1983, connects multiple cities, counties, and states to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to commuter rail, SEPTA also operates heavy rail, light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, SEPTA Commuter Rail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 10.4 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, SEPTA Commuter Rail's passenger boardings remained 33.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted SEPTA Commuter Rail's largest source of funding (44.1 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 20.8 percent of SEPTA Commuter Rail's total funding.

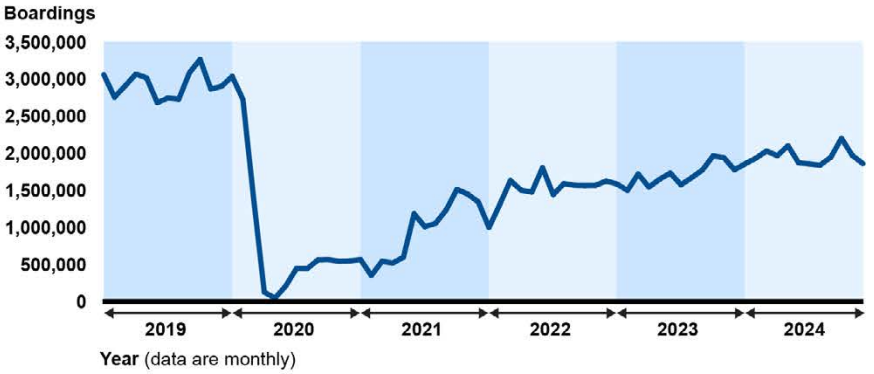
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

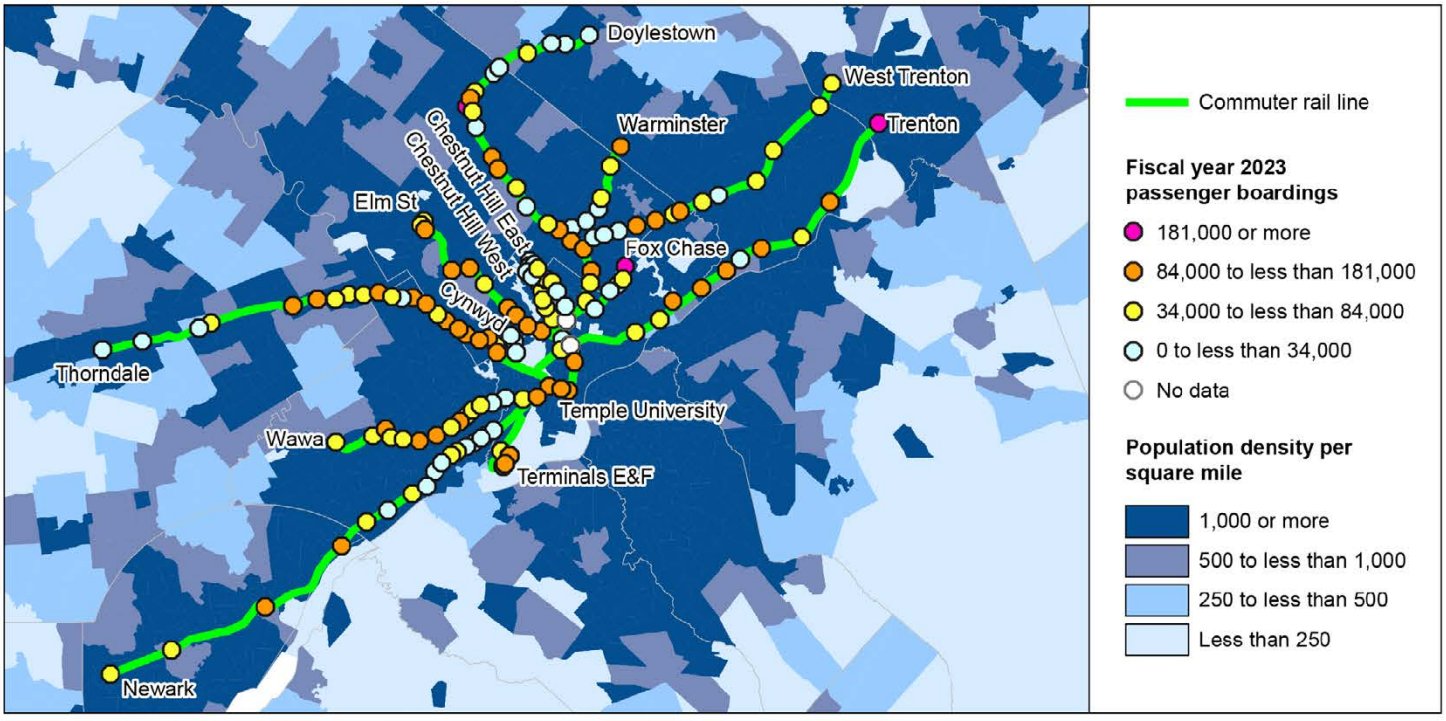
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Shore Line East

Connecticut and New York

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 9
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 101.2
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 167,525

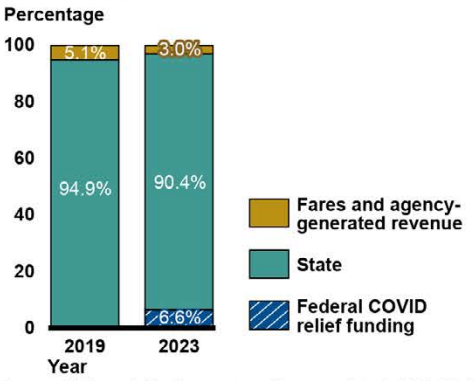
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $5,514,793
- Operating Costs: $20,185,420

System Description

Shore Line East, which began operation in 1990 by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, connects New Haven to New London, Connecticut. In addition to commuter rail, the Connecticut Department of Transportation also operates heavy rail, fixed route bus, bus rapid transit, paratransit, shuttle service, and ferry. For the 6 months ending in June 2024, Shore Line East's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 28.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Shore Line East's passenger boardings remained 74.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted Shore Line East's largest source of funding (90.4 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 6.6 percent of Shore Line East's total funding.

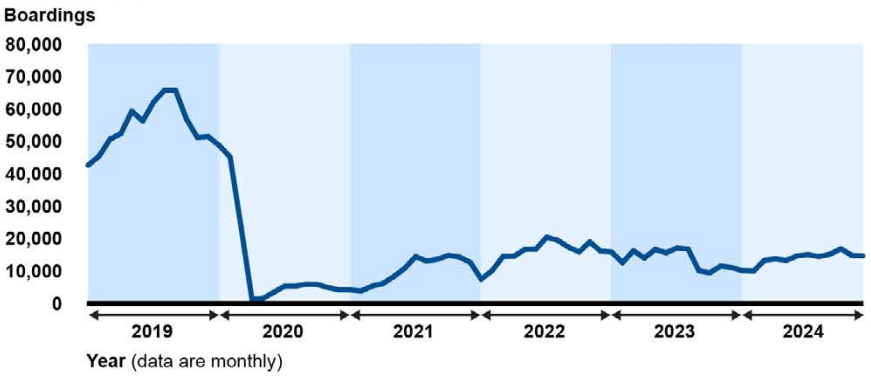
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

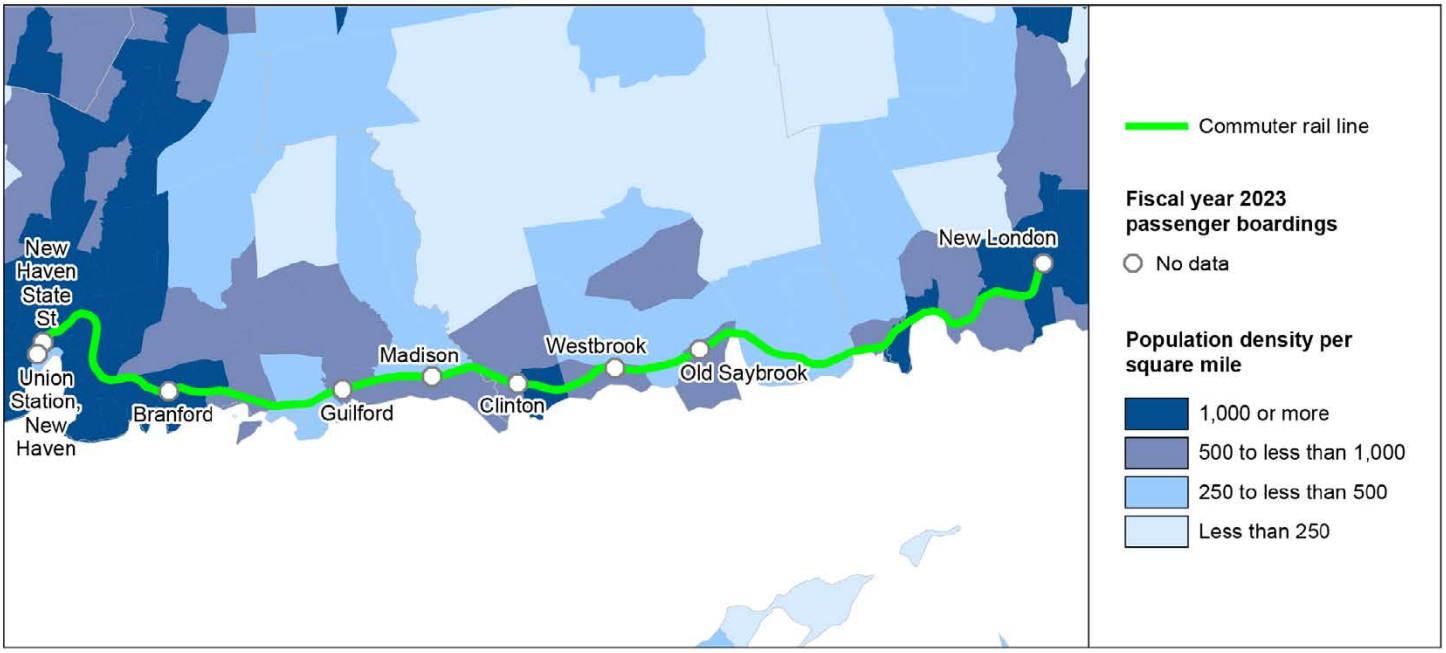
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

SMART

California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 12
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 90.1
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 750,016

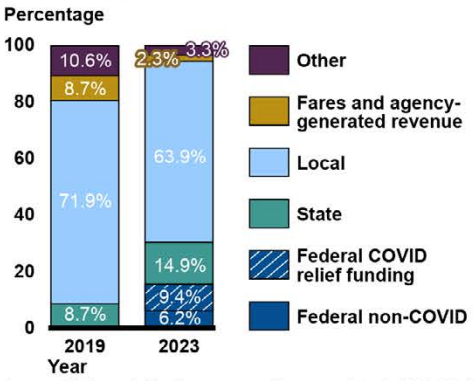
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $5,192,722
- Operating Costs: $38,876,991

System Description

Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART), which began operation in 2017 by the SMART District, connects Sonoma and Marin Counties, California. In addition to commuter rail, SMART also operates shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, SMART's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 11.7 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, SMART's passenger boardings were 41.1 percent above pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted SMART's largest source of funding (63.9 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, state and federal funding also made up a larger share of SMART's total funding (14.9 percent and 15.6 percent), compared to 2019.

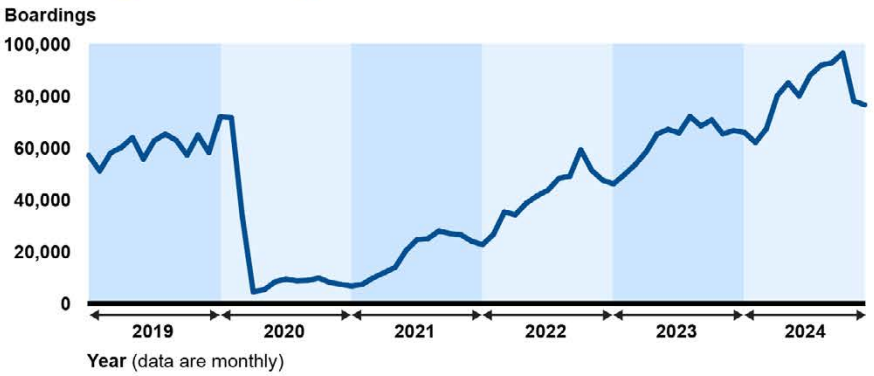
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Sounder

Washington

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 12
- Number of Lines: 2
- Total Directional Route Miles: 163.8
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,755,751

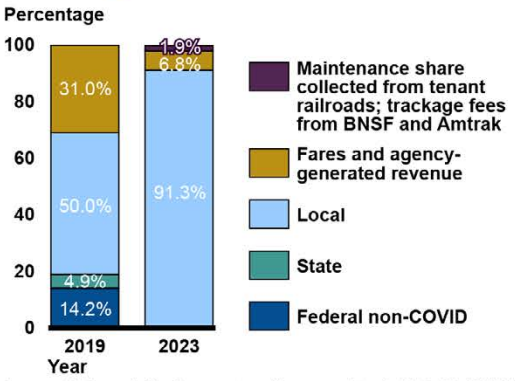
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $38,800,628
- Operating Costs: $72,677,176

System Description

Sounder, which began operation in 2000 by the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit), connects Lakewood and Everett to Seattle, Washington. In addition to commuter rail, Sound Transit also operates light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Sounder's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 23.7 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Sounder's passenger boardings remained 59.5 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted nearly all of Sounder's funding (91.3 percent), compared to half in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, revenue from fares and agency-generated sources represented 6.8 percent of Sounder's total funding, down from 31 percent in 2019.

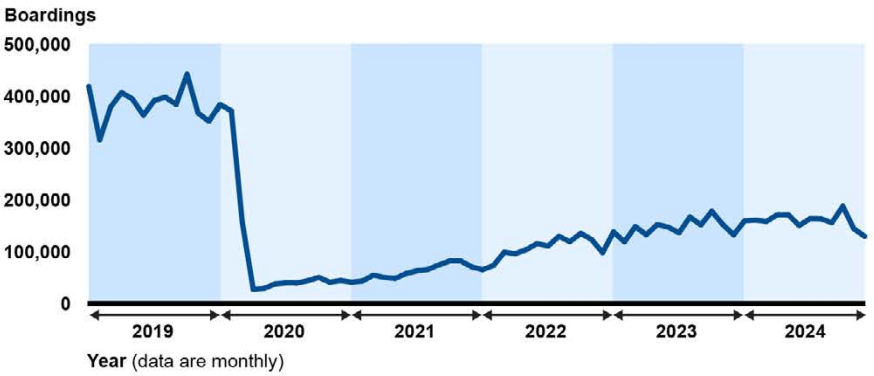
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

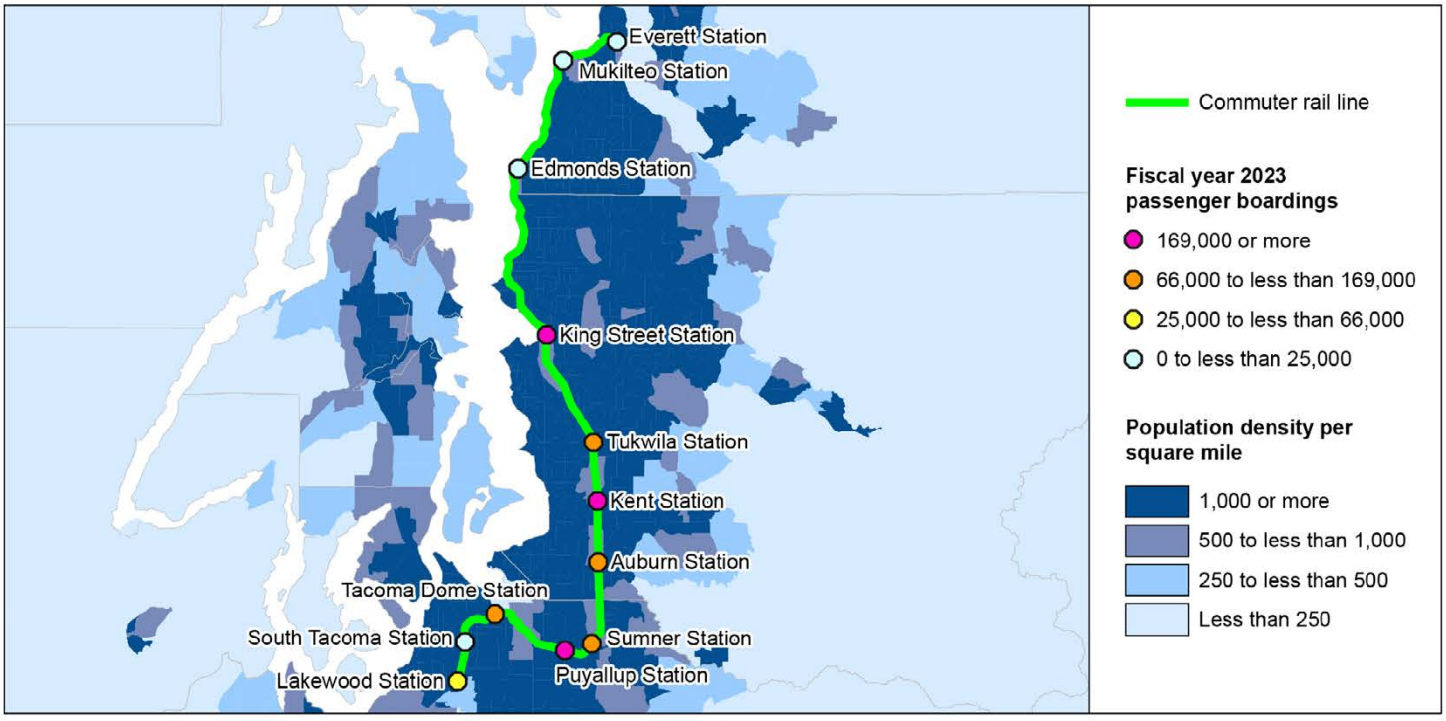
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

South Shore Line

Indiana and Illinois

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 19
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 179.8
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,526,836

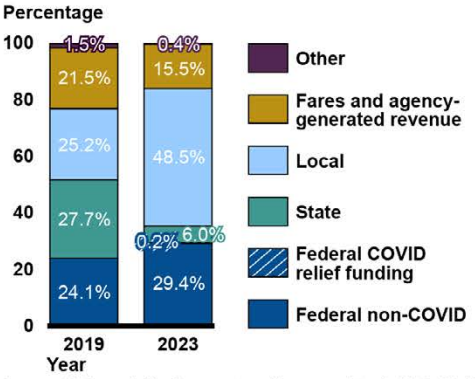
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $453,300,000
- Operating Costs: $53,011,000

System Description

South Shore Line, which began operation in 1903 by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, connects South Bend, Indiana, to Chicago, Illinois. The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, South Shore Line's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 21.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, South Shore Line's passenger boardings remained 42.1 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted South Shore Line's largest source of funding (48.5 percent), as compared to state funding in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal non-COVID-19 relief funding made up 29.4 percent of the system's total funding.

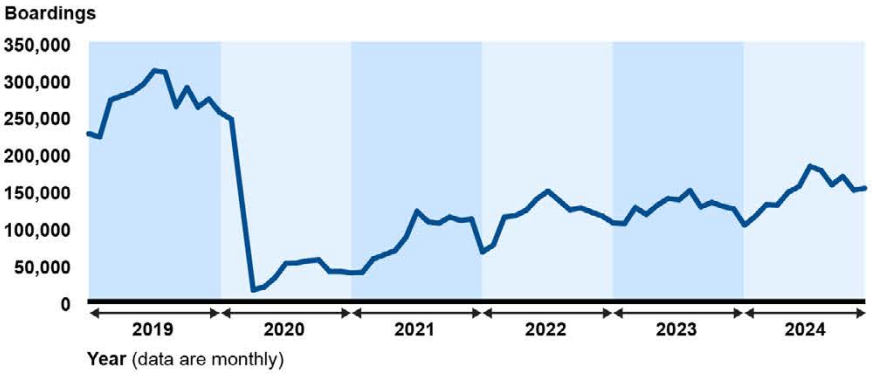
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

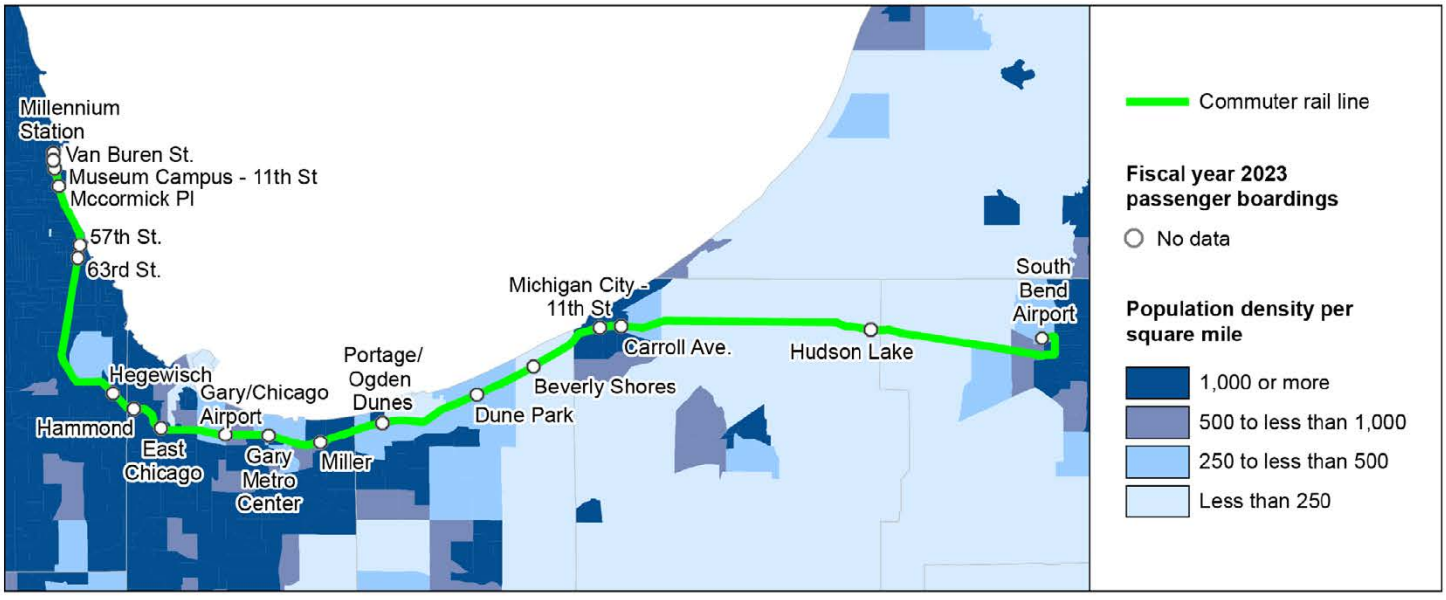
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

SPRINTER

California

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 15
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 44
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,754,585

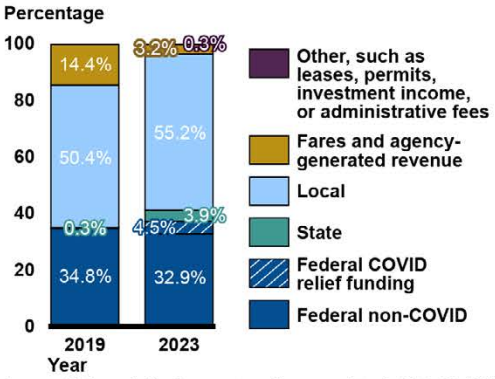
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $5,500,000
- Operating Costs: $29,883,425

System Description

SPRINTER, which began operation in 2008 by the North County Transit District, provides service between Escondido and Oceanside, California. In addition to commuter rail, North County Transit District also operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and the COASTER commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, SPRINTER's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 28.2 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, SPRINTER's passenger boardings remained 22.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted SPRINTER's largest source of funding (55.2 percent), similar to 2019.

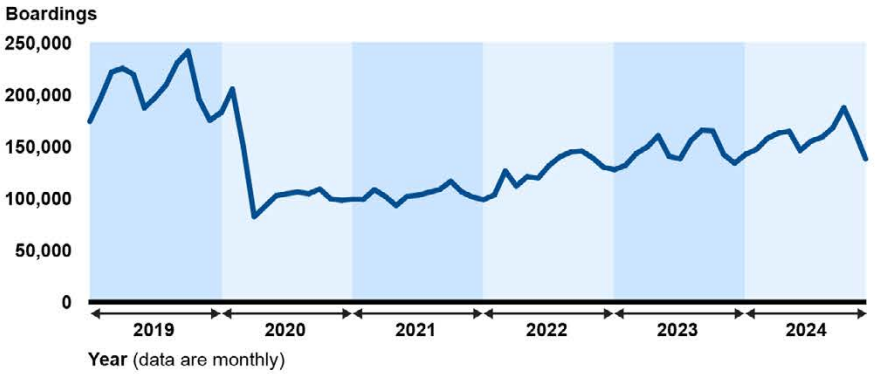
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

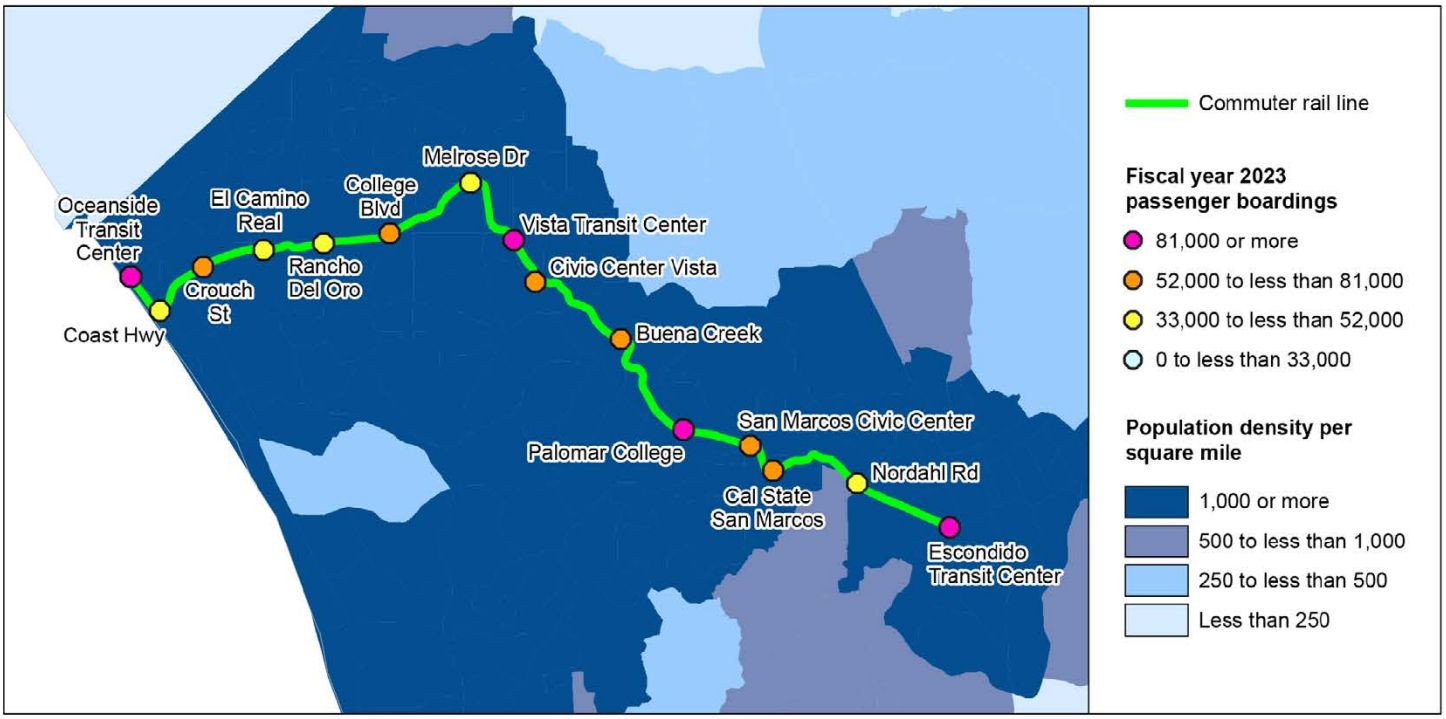
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

SunRail

Florida

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 17
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 61
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,083,528

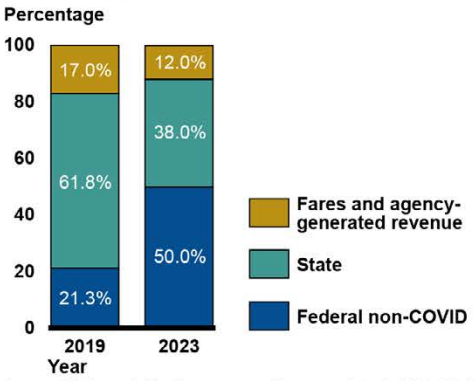
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $59,942,563
- Operating Costs: $67,887,771

System Description

SunRail, which began operation in 2014 by the Florida Department of Transportation, connects Central Florida to Orlando, Florida. The Florida Department of Transportation only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, SunRail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 0.4 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, SunRail's passenger boardings remained 21 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, federal non-COVID-19 relief funding constituted SunRail's largest source of funding (50 percent), as compared to state funding in 2019.

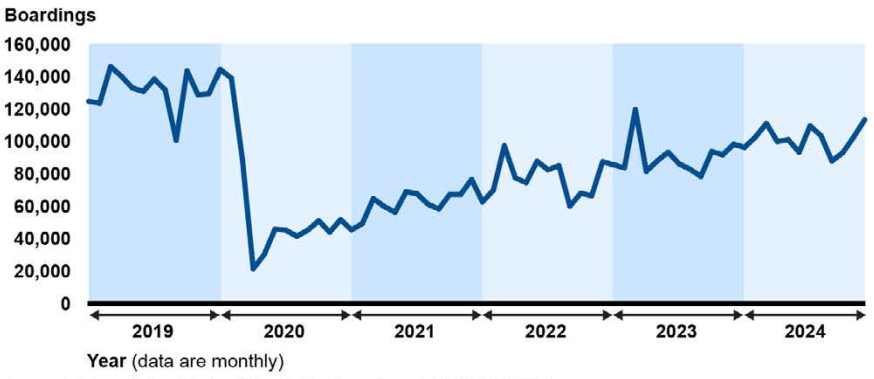
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

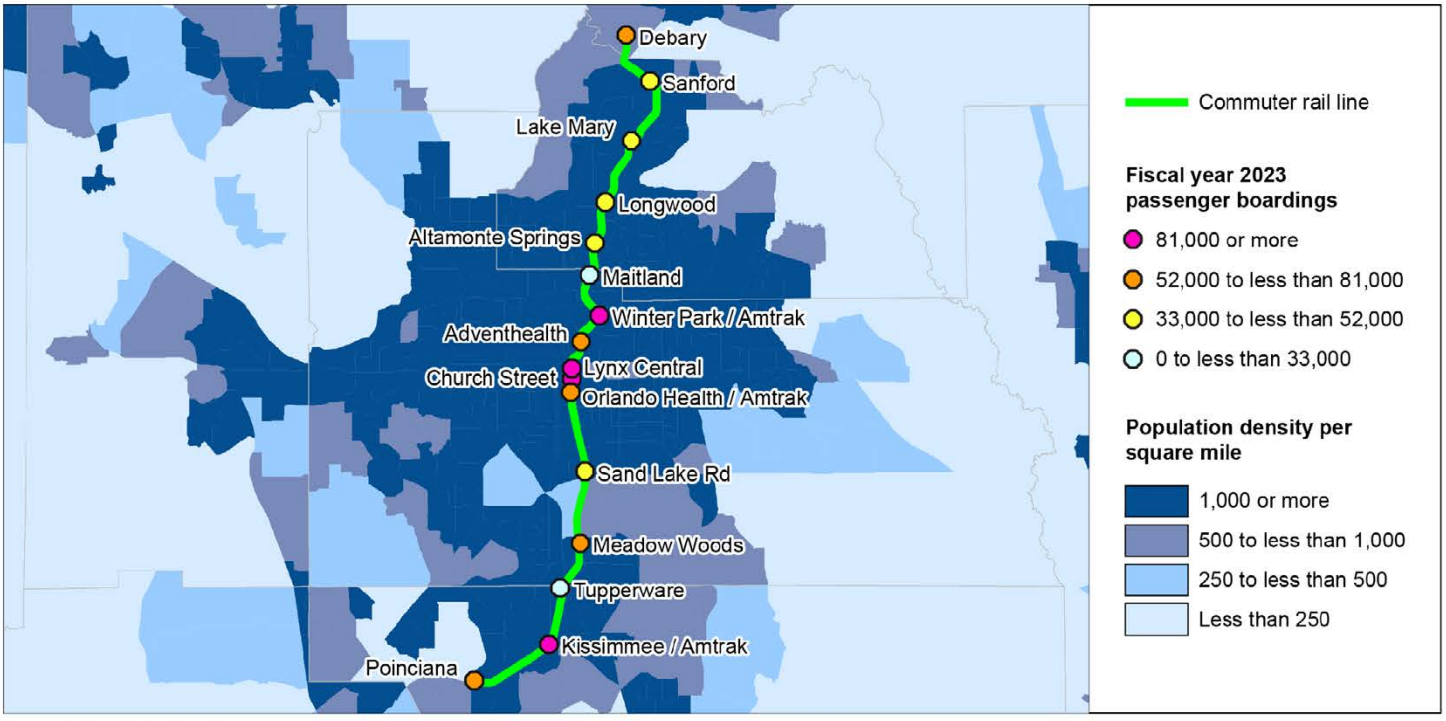
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

TEXRail

Texas

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 9
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 52.3
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 714,716

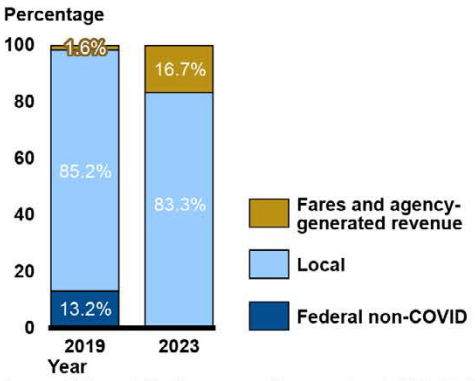
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $6,900,000
- Operating Costs: $27,000,000

System Description

TEXRail, which began operation in 2019 by the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, provides service between Fort Worth and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, Texas. In addition to commuter rail, the Fort Worth Transportation Authority operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, TEXRail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 6.1 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, TEXRail's passenger boardings were 71.7 percent above pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted TEXRail's largest source of funding (83.3 percent), similar to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, fares and agency-generated revenue increased to 16.7 percent of TEXRail's total funding.

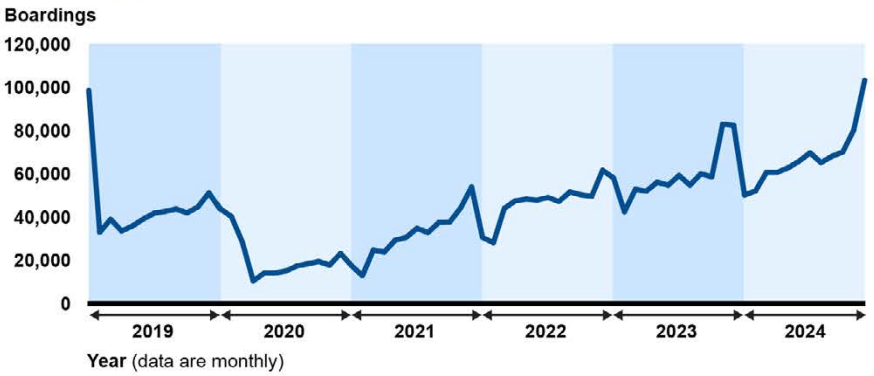
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map

Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Trinity Railway Express

Texas

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 10
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 72.3
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,150,851

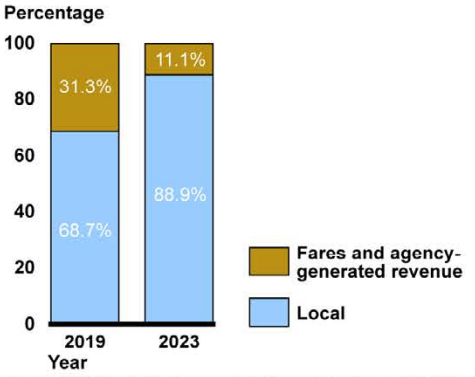
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $12,107,657
- Operating Costs: $43,525,590

System Description

Trinity Railway Express, which began operation in 1996 by Dallas Area Rapid Transit, provides service between Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas. In addition to commuter rail, Dallas Area Rapid Transit operates light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Trinity Railway Express's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 8.5 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Trinity Railway Express's passenger boardings remained 36.4 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, local funding constituted Trinity Railway Express's largest source of funding (88.9 percent), similar to 2019. Fare revenues as a percent of total funding declined during this time.

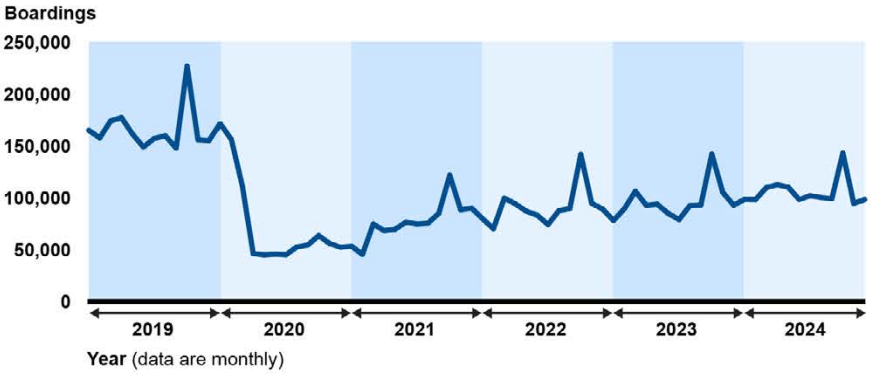
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

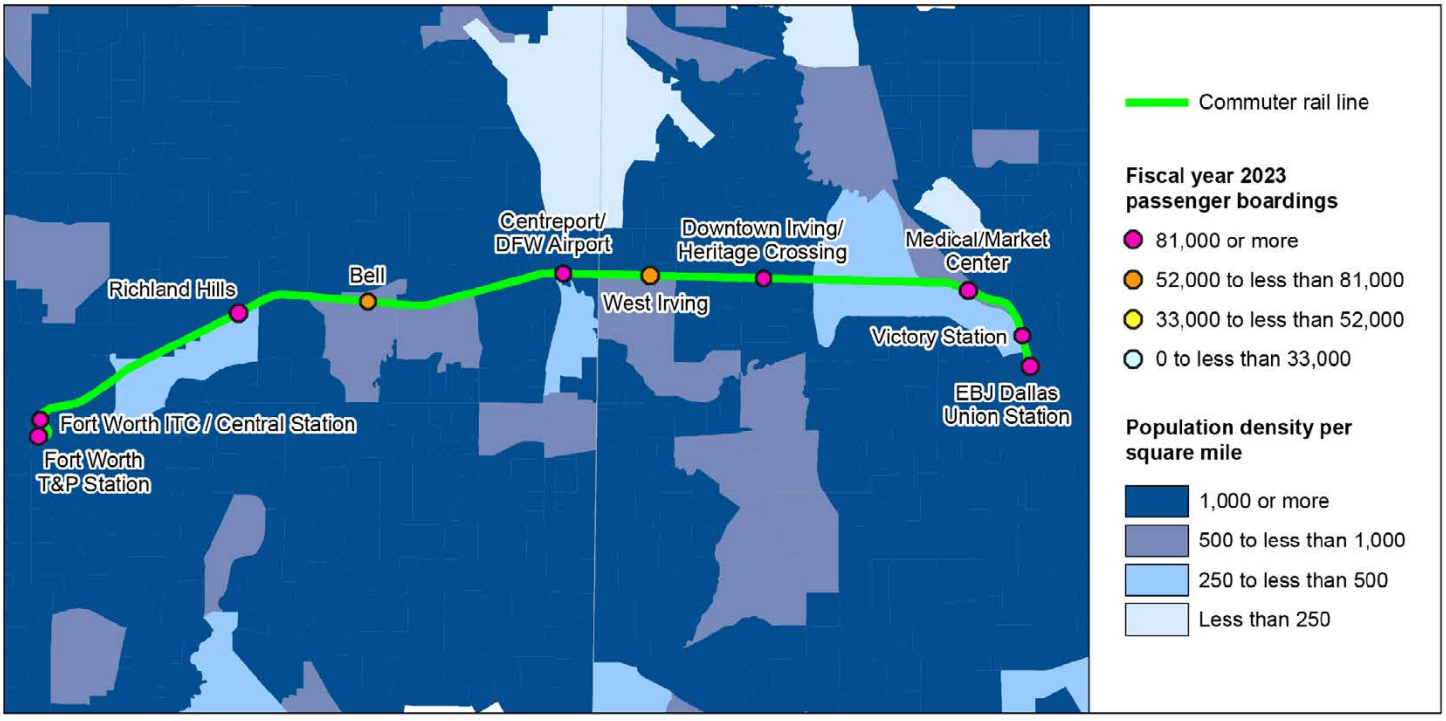
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Tri-Rail

Florida

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 19
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 147
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 3,981,069

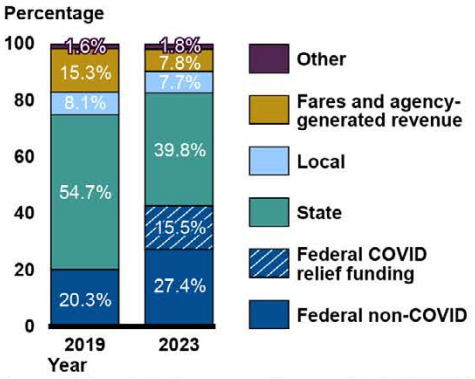
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $39,074,082
- Operating Costs: $128,554,319

System Description

Tri-Rail, which began operation in 1989 by the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA), connects multiple cities in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties, Florida. In addition to commuter rail, SFRTA operates shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, Tri-Rail's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 7.2 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, Tri-Rail's passenger boardings were 0.7 percent above pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding as a percentage of total funding declined but remained Tri-Rail's largest source of funding (39.8 percent), compared to 2019. In fiscal year 2023, COVID-19 relief funding made up 15.5 percent of Tri-Rail's total funding.

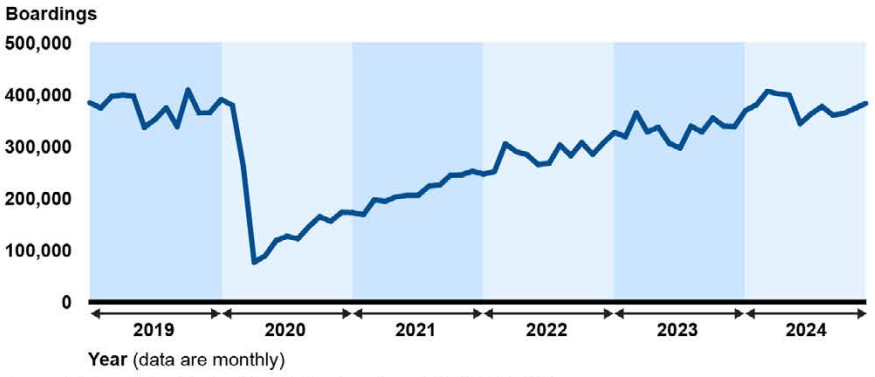
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

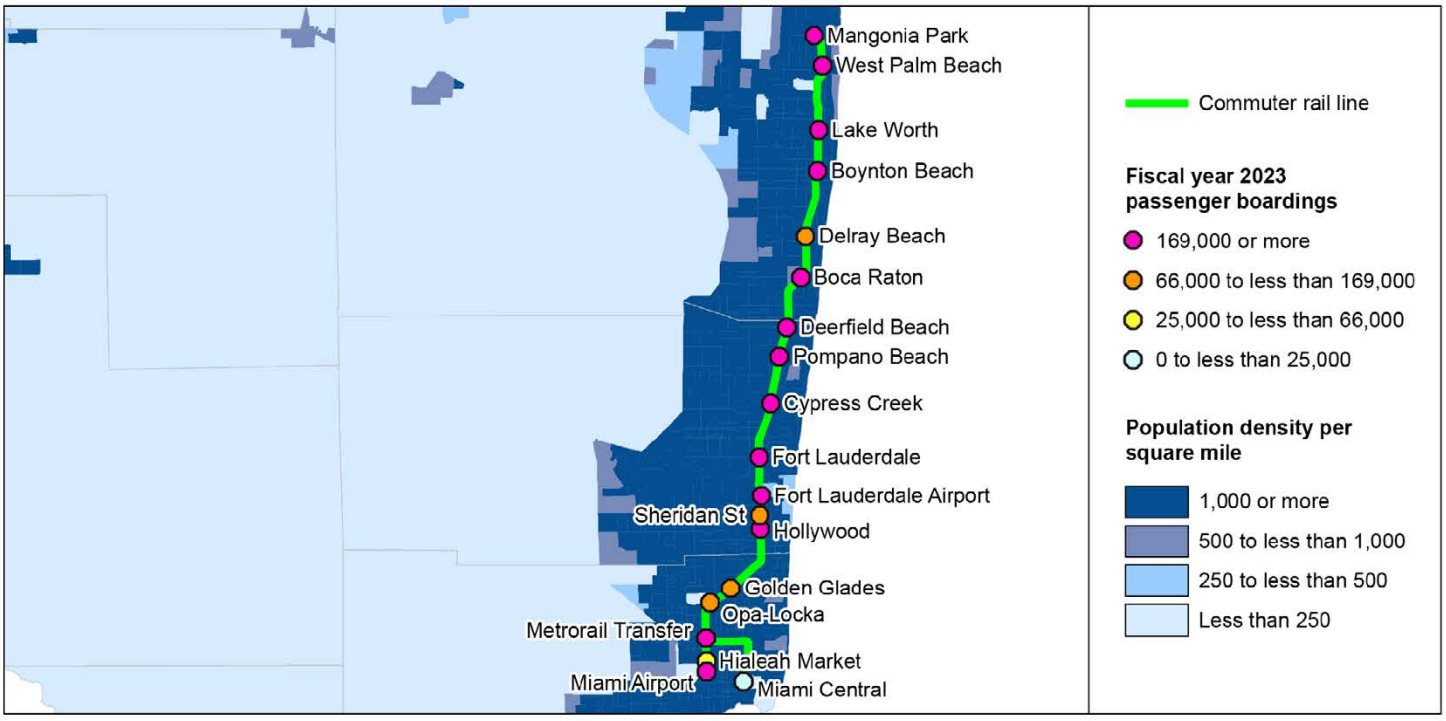
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

VRE

Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 19
- Number of Lines: 2
- Total Directional Route Miles: 173.6
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 1,536,895

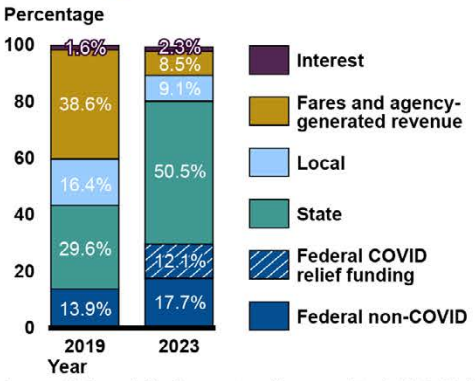
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $169,192,000
- Operating Costs: $92,086,000

System Description

Virginia Railway Express (VRE), which began operation in 1992, connects Northern Virginia to Washington, D.C. VRE only operates commuter rail. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, VRE's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 1.1 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, VRE's passenger boardings remained 65.9 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, state funding constituted VRE's largest source of funding (50.5 percent), as compared to fares and agency-generated revenue in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, COVID-19 relief funding made up 12.1 percent of VRE's total funding.

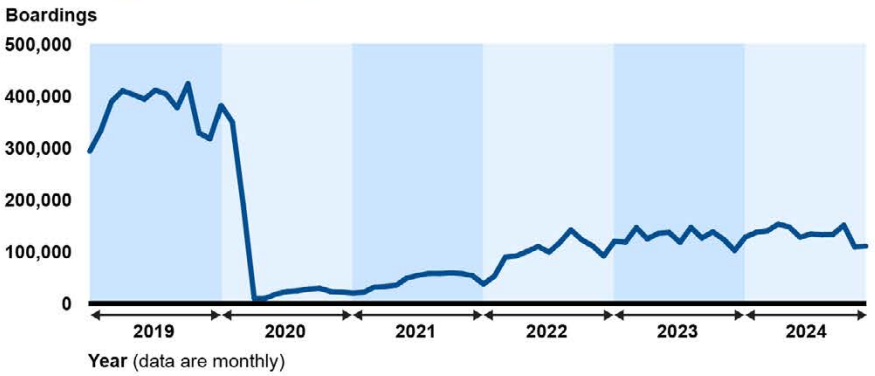
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

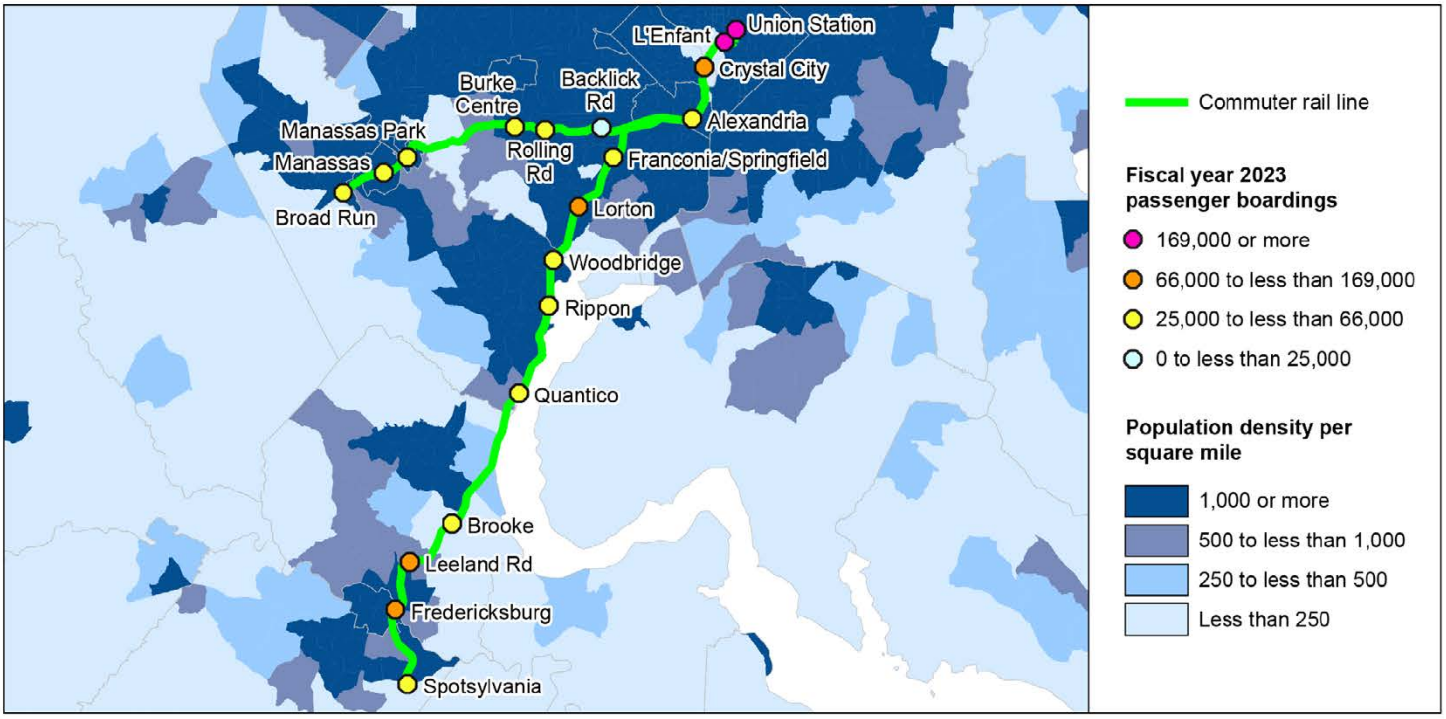
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

WeGo Star

Tennessee

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 7
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 62.8
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 99,914

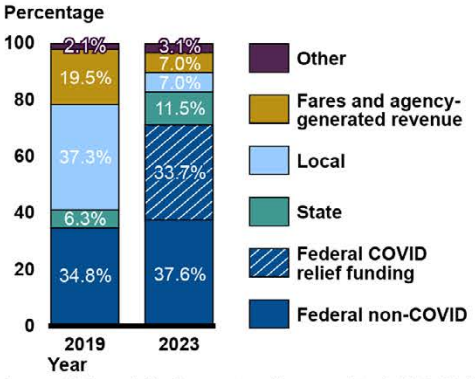
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $506,737
- Operating Costs: $5,381,304

System Description

WeGo Star, which began operation in 2006 by the Regional Transportation Authority, connects multiple cities to Nashville, Tennessee. In addition to commuter rail, the Regional Transportation Authority also operates fixed route bus, paratransit, and shuttle service. For the 6 months ending in October 2024, WeGo Star's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 0.1 percent above 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, WeGo Star's passenger boardings remained 53.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, federal non-COVID-19 relief funding constituted WeGo Star's largest source of funding (37.6 percent), as compared to local funding in 2019. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 relief funding made up 33.7 percent of WeGo Star's total funding.

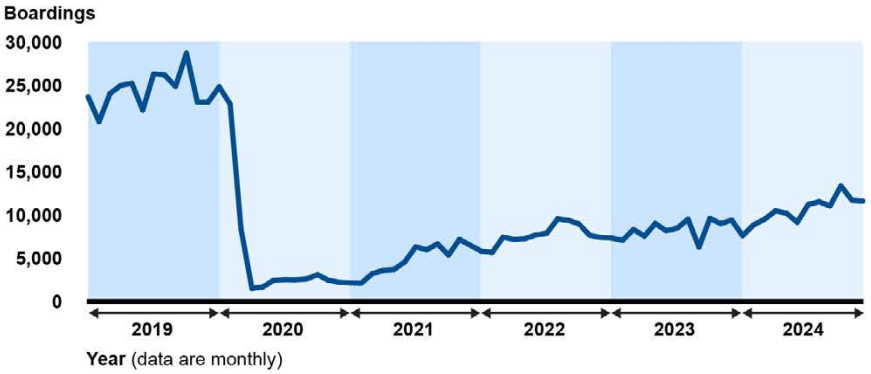
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

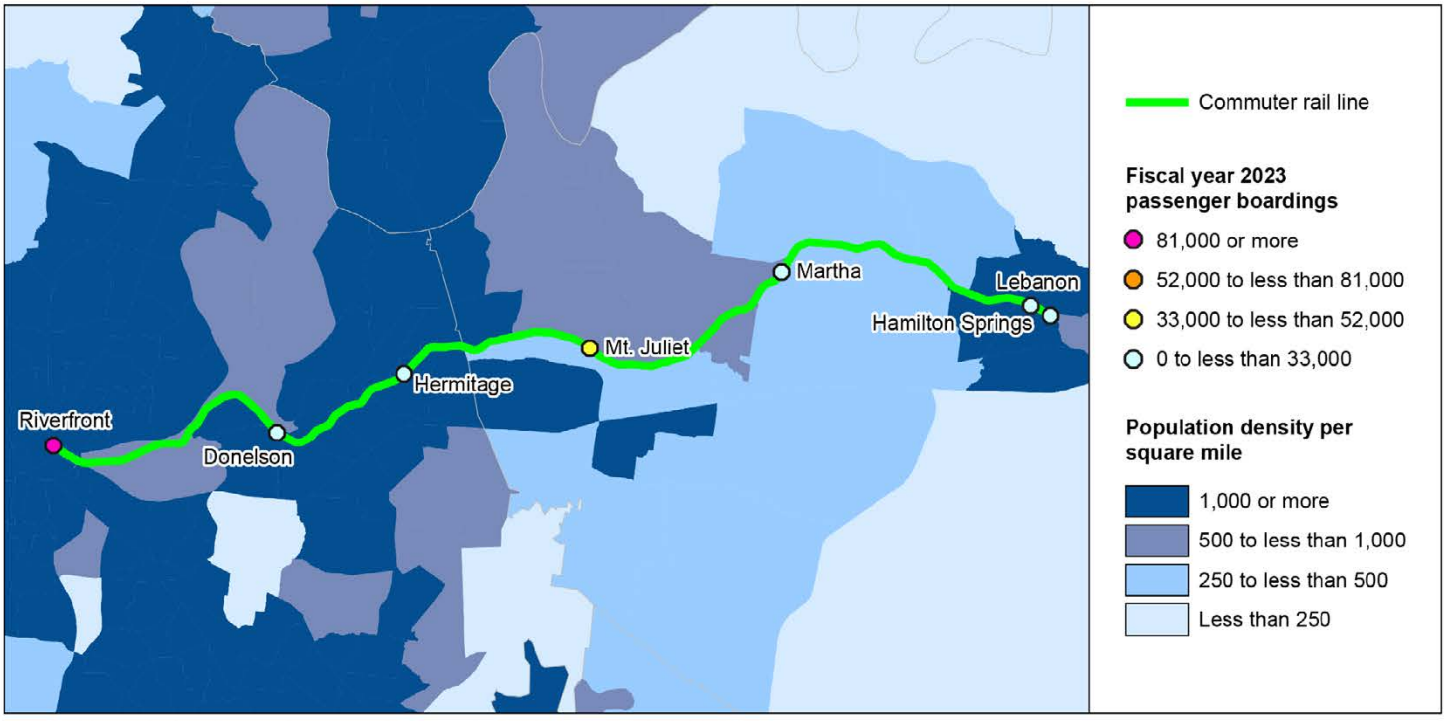
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

WES

Oregon

Summary Statistics

- Number of Stations: 5
- Number of Lines: 1
- Total Directional Route Miles: 29.2
- 2023 Annual Passenger Boardings: 115,299

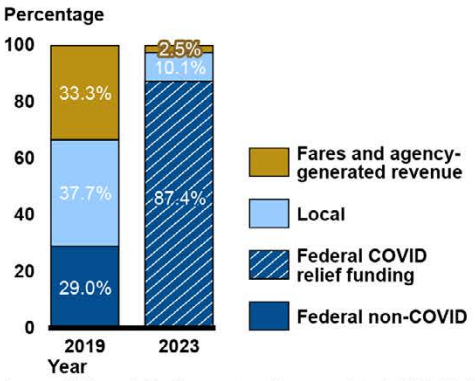
Fiscal Year 2023

- Capital Costs: $28,613
- Operating Costs: $10,507,467

System Description

Westside Express Service (WES), which began operation in 2009 by the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (Tri-Met), connects Wilsonville to Beaverton, Oregon. In addition to commuter rail, Tri-Met also operates light rail, fixed route bus, and paratransit. For the 6 months ending in December 2024, WES's service levels (measured in vehicle revenue hours) were 51.9 percent below 2019 service levels for the same 6-month period. Since the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis of the National Transit Database showed that for the 6 months ending in December 2024, WES's passenger boardings remained 66.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels. In fiscal year 2023, federal COVID-19 funding constituted WES's largest source of funding (87.4 percent), as compared to local funding in 2019. Fares and agency-generated revenue as a percentage of total funding declined substantially during this time.

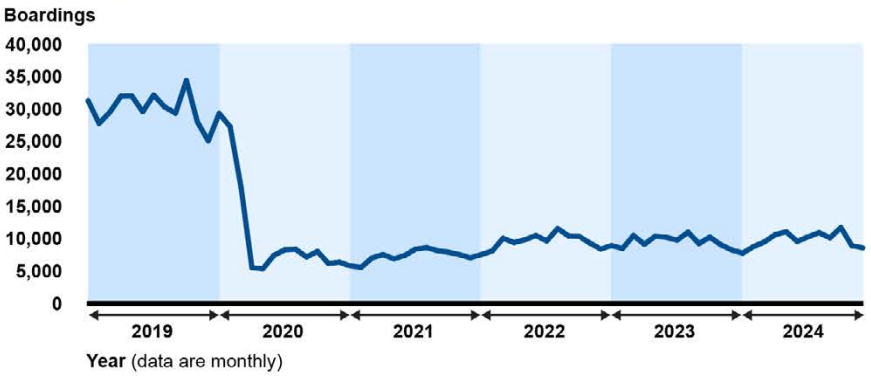
Funding Sources



Source: GAO analysis of commuter rail agency data. | GAO-25-107511

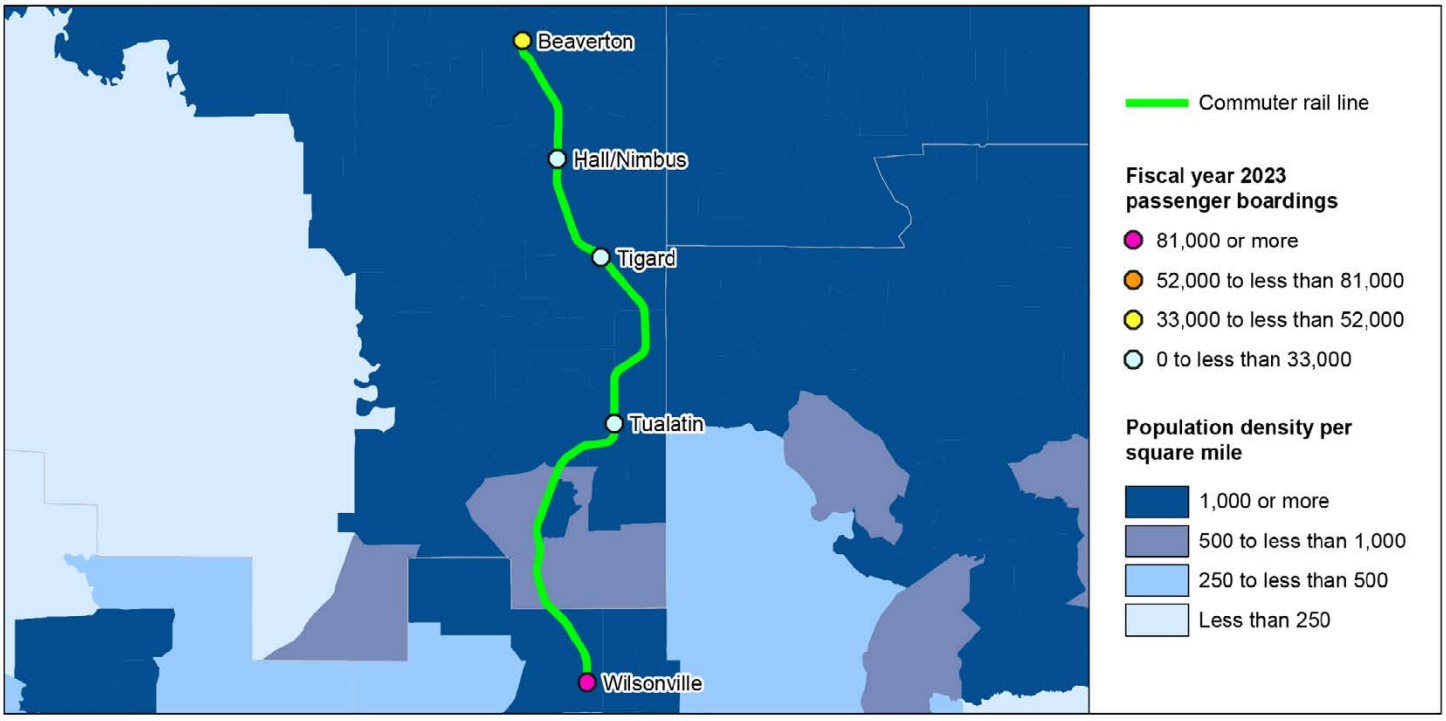
Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding

Passenger Boardings



Source: GAO analysis of National Transit Database data. | GAO-25-107511

System Map



Source: GAO analysis of transit agency, Department of Transportation, and Census data. | GAO-25-107511

Appendix II: Federal Funding Related to Commuter Rail Provided Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Federal Highway Administration Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (23 U.S.C. § 133)[b]	Funding for state and local transportation needs, including construction of highways, bridges, and tunnels, and transit capital projects eligible for assistance under 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.	Highway Trust Fund	Formula	Capital	$13,835,404,382	$14,112,112,470	$14,394,354,721	$14,682,241,816	$14,975,886,619	**$72,000,000,008**
Federal Transit Administration Urbanized Area Formula Grants (49 U.S.C. § 5307)[c]	Funding for public transportation in urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 people or more. Eligible recipients are states and government authorities for one or more urbanized areas. Eligible projects include capital investments in new and existing fixed guideway systems including rolling stock, overhaul and rebuilding of vehicles, station infrastructure, track, signals, communications, and computer hardware and software.	Highway Trust Fund	Formula	Capital, planning, job access and reverse commute,[d] and operating expenses[e] in urbanized areas of under 200,000 people	$6,408,288,249	$6,542,164,133	$6,712,987,840	$6,851,662,142	$7,025,844,743	**$33,540,947,107**

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grant Program (49 U.S.C. § 5309)[f]	Funding to support the construction of new rail, bus rapid transit, and ferry systems, and to expand existing systems. States and local government authorities are eligible recipients.	General Fund	Competitive	Capital	$4,600,000,000	$4,600,000,000	$4,600,000,000	$4,600,000,000	$4,600,000,000	**$23,000,000,000**
Federal Transit Administration State of Good Repair Grant Program (49 U.S.C. § 5337(c)-(d))[g]	Funding for maintaining rail, bus rapid transit, trolleybus, and ferry systems, including projects to replace, rebuild, and rehabilitate track, line equipment and structures, signals and communications, and passenger stations and terminals. Eligible recipients are states and local government authorities in urbanized areas with fixed guideway and high intensity motorbus systems in revenue service for at least seven years.	Highway Trust Fund and General Fund	Formula	Capital	$4,165,528,226	$4,237,778,037	$4,330,934,484	$4,405,675,417	$4,500,496,668	**$21,640,412,832**

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Federal Highway Administration Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program (23 U.S.C. § 149)	Funding for transportation projects and other programs that contribute to air quality improvements in nonattainment areas (i.e., areas that do not meet air quality standards) or maintenance areas (i.e., areas that were designed as air quality nonattainment areas but later redesignated as air quality attainment areas). Funds are distributed to states under the program. States that do not have nonattainment or maintenance areas receive a minimum apportionment of funding for either CMAQ eligible projects or projects that are eligible under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program.	Highway Trust Fund	Formula	Capital projects that reduce emissions, and certain operating expenses,[e] including in areas eligible under FTA's Urbanized Area and Rural Area programs	$2,536,490,803	$2,587,220,620	$2,638,965,032	$2,691,744,332	$2,745,579,213	**$13,200,000,000**

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Department of Transportation Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Discretionary Grant Program (49 U.S.C. § 6702)[h]	Funding for planning and constructing surface transportation infrastructure projects, including public transportation projects, that have a significant impact in local and regional communities by improving safety, environmental sustainability, or mobility and community connectivity. Eligible recipients include states, local governments, Indian Tribes, and transit agencies.	General Fund	Competitive	Capital	$1,500,000,000	$1,500,000,000	$1,500,000,000	$1,500,000,000	$1,500,000,000	**$7,500,000,000**
Federal Transit Administration Formula Grants for Rural Areas (49 U.S.C. § 5311)[c]	Funding for public transportation in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000 people. Eligible recipients are states and Indian Tribes, and eligible subrecipients are state and local government authorities, nonprofit organizations, and operators of public transportation or intercity bus service.	Highway Trust Fund	Formula[i]	Capital, planning, job access and reverse commute,[d] operating expenses,[e] and acquisition of public transportation services	$875,289,555	$893,575,275	$916,907,591	$935,848,712	$959,639,810	**$4,581,260,943**

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Federal Transit Administration All Stations Accessibility Program (IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, 1439-40 (2021))	Funding for state and local government authorities to finance capital projects to upgrade the accessibility of legacy rail fixed guideway public transportation systems for people with disabilities. Funding may be used for projects to repair, improve, modify, retrofit, or relocate infrastructure of stations or facilities for passenger use and to develop or modify a plan for pursuing public transportation accessibility projects.	General Fund	Competitive	Capital	$350,000,000	$350,000,000	$350,000,000	$350,000,000	$350,000,000	**$1,750,000,000**

Program	Description	Source of funds	Type of allocation	Allowable project types	Fiscal year 2022	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026	Total funds provided under the IIJA, fiscal years 2022–2026[a]
Federal Transit Administration Competitive Grants for Rail Vehicle Replacement (49 U.S.C. § 5337(f))	In addition to the formula program described above, the State of Good Repair Program includes a competitive program that funds the replacement of rail rolling stock, consisting of revenue service vehicles, passenger carrying vehicles, and locomotives necessary for the provision of rail public transportation. Eligible recipients are state and local government authorities in urbanized areas that are eligible for State of Good Repair formula funding.	Highway Trust Fund	Competitive	Capital	$300,000,000	$300,000,000	$300,000,000	$300,000,000	$300,000,000	**$1,500,000,000**

Source: GAO analysis of federal statutes. | GAO-25-107511

Note: On January 20, 2025, the Administration issued an Executive Order to pause the disbursement of certain funds appropriated through the IIJA and directed agencies to review their processes, policies, and programs for issuing grants and other financial disbursements under the IIJA for consistency with the law and the policy of the Executive Order. See Exec. Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (Jan. 20, 2025). In addition to the programs described in this table, the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Emergency Relief Program may provide funding for commuter rail in response to an emergency, which includes a natural disaster affecting a wide area (such as a flood, hurricane, tidal wave, earthquake, severe storm, or landslide) or a catastrophic failure from any external cause. Under this program, when Congress has appropriated funding for this purpose, the FTA may make grant funding available for capital projects to protect, repair, reconstruct, or replace equipment and facilities of a public transportation system that is in danger of suffering serious damage, or has suffered serious damage, as a result of an emergency and for eligible operating costs of public transportation equipment and facilities in an area directly affected by an emergency.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA), and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) appropriated approximately $25 billion, $14 billion, and $30.5 billion, respectively, to the FTA to support the transit industry through the Urbanized Area and Rural Area formula programs. CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136, 134 Stat. 281, 599-600 (2020); CRRSAA, Pub. L. No. 116-260, 134 Stat. 1909, 1945-47 (2020); ARPA, Pub. L. No. 117-2, 135 Stat. 4, 72-73 (2021). The CARES Act, CRRSAA, and ARPA permitted recipients of federal transit funding to use the funding for a wide array of capital and operating expenses with no limit on the amount used for operating expenses. Some of the COVID-19 funding required that it be used for payroll and operating expenses to the maximum extent possible. However, if the recipient certified to the FTA that the recipient had not furloughed any employees, then the recipient was not required to prioritize payroll and operating expenses before other expenses.

[a]These amounts reflect the total funding provided under the IIJA and do not subtract administrative expenses or set asides other than the FTA Competitive Grants for Rail Vehicle Replacement, which is a set aside of the State of Good Repair Formula Grants Program.

[b]The amounts provided for the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program are approximately 28 percent of the amounts remaining from the base apportionment amounts (as set forth in the IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, § 11101, 135 Stat. 429, 443 (2021)) after subtracting the amounts provided for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program, the National Highway Freight Program, and Metropolitan Planning. See 23 U.S.C. § 104(b)(2), (4)-(6), (h). The amounts listed in the table have been rounded to the nearest whole dollar. The numbers reflected in the table for the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program reflect DOT's official apportionment, which is calculated and rounded first at the state level and then summed to arrive at the program total.

[c]The amounts provided in the table for the Urbanized Area and Rural Area formula programs do not include apportionments based on growing states and high density formula factors under 49 U.S.C. § 5340. The IIJA includes an authorization to 49 U.S.C. § 5340, which makes funds available to FTA's Urbanized Area and Rural Area formula programs. Pub. L. No. 117-58, § 30017, 135 Stat. 429, 912 (2021). The IIJA provides $392,752,680 for fiscal year 2022, $400,957,696 for fiscal year 2023, $411,427,180 for fiscal year 2024, $419,926,283 for fiscal year 2025, and $430,601,628 for fiscal year 2026 for growing state apportionments under section 5340(c); and $348,290,112 for fiscal year 2022, $355,566,259 for fiscal year 2023, $364,850,518 for fiscal year 2024, $372,387,459 for fiscal year 2025, and $381,854,274 for fiscal year 2026 for high density state apportionments under section 5340(d). The specific growing state apportionment funding provided between these two programs is unascertainable under the IIJA.

[d]Job access and reverse commute projects are transportation projects to finance planning, capital, and operating costs that support the development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment, including transportation projects that facilitate the provision of public transportation services from urbanized areas and rural areas to suburban employment locations. 49 U.S.C. § 5302(10).

[e]Operating expenses are those costs necessary to operate, maintain, and manage a public transportation system. Operating expenses usually include such costs as labor, fuel, and items having a useful life of less than one year.

[f]The amounts provided for the Capital Investment Grant Program include: (1) the amounts provided in IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, § 30017, 135 Stat. 429, 914 (2021); and (2) the supplemental amount provided in IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, 1438 (2021), of $8,000,000,000 for Capital Investment Grants to be distributed in equal amounts for each of fiscal years 2022 through 2026.

[g]The amounts provided for the State of Good Repair Grant Program include: (1) the amounts provided in IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, § 30017, 135 Stat. 429, 913 (2021) after subtracting the $300,000,000 per fiscal year set aside for Competitive Grants for Rail Vehicle Replacement; and (2) the supplemental amount provided in IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, 1438 (2021), of $4,750,000,000 for State of Good Repair formula grants under 49 U.S.C. § 5337(c)-(d) to be distributed in equal amounts for each of fiscal years 2022 through 2026.

[h]This program was formerly named Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) and Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER).

[i]This program also includes Public Transportation on Indian Reservations competitive grants under 49 U.S.C. § 5311(c)(2)(A).

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Andrew Von Ah, vonaha@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Sarah Farkas (Assistant Director); Melissa Greenaway (Analyst-in-Charge); Laura Bonomini; Delwen Jones; Stephanie Lola; Dan Luo; John Mingus; Rebecca Morrow; Shannon Murphy; Josh Ormond; McKenna Ventura; Erin Villareal; and Elizabeth Wood made key contributions to this report.

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