

Marist Institute for Public Opinion

INTERCITY PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE
A Study Conducted for
Empire Corridor Rail Task Force
Empire State Passengers Association
January, 1998

Marist College
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

**Empire Corridor Rail Task Force
Empire State Passengers Association**

Intercity Passenger Train Service

New York State Survey 1998

Study conducted by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion
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Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

Summary

This section highlights the key findings of the study.

- **Registered voters in New York State think that intercity passenger train service should be improved and modernized, not eliminated.**

97% of registered voters throughout the state think that trains used for long distance travel should be improved and modernized. 19% of the state's voters think that intercity passenger train service should be eliminated.

- **82% of New York's voters believe that having improved and modernized intercity passenger train service is at least as important as having good highways and airports.**

This view is held by most voters throughout the state regardless of the region in which they live or their political party. Democrats, Republicans and Independents agree that to improve and modernize rail service within the state is at least as important as maintaining other means of transportation.

- **New York's registered voters overwhelmingly support the state using more money to improve intercity passenger train service.**

87% of registered voters throughout the state favor an increase in resources for intercity passenger train service in New York. 26% of the state's voters strongly support and 61% support following the lead of several other states and using more state money to improve train service.

- **A New York State bond issue receives the greatest support when the state's voters are asked specifically how to fund added expenditures for intercity passenger train service.**

57% of registered voters throughout the state support borrowing through a New York State bond issue to improve the state's intercity rail service. A majority of the state's voters in each region of the state, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike, support this method of financing.

Registered voters narrowly oppose using existing state highway funds to finance intercity passenger train service. 53% of registered voters oppose using state highway funds as a source of revenue for intercity passenger train service, and 47% support such a measure. 62% of the state's voters oppose a tax increase of a penny a gallon for this purpose.

- **More than one-quarter of New Yorkers who took a trip of 75 miles or more in the past year traveled by train.**

Most New York voters have taken a trip of 75 miles or more from home in the past year. 27% of these travelers have used intercity passenger train service to get to and from their destinations. In addition, 45% of those who traveled 75 miles or more by train, did so three or more times in the past year.

- **Most New Yorkers would consider taking their next trip by train.**

73% of the state's registered voters would definitely (23%) or possibly (50%) consider using intercity passenger train service on their next trip of 75 miles or more from home.

- **Among those New Yorkers who would consider taking their next trip by train, the improvement mentioned most often is better scheduling and performance.**

This issue includes those who mentioned faster, more frequent and reliable service as improvements they would like to see. This view is of special concern to Upstate voters. Additional items include lower fares, better onboard service and comfort, improved stations, and extended service to new destinations.

- **The main reason given by New Yorkers who would not consider traveling by rail on their next trip is a preference for other means of transportation.**

Although this opinion is shared by voters throughout the state, it is mentioned more often by voters in New York City and its Suburbs. Other concerns cited by those who choose not to travel by train include schedules and performance, lack of train service to a specific destination, access to and from stations, lack of convenience, fares, and dissatisfaction with onboard service and comfort.

Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

How the Survey Was Conducted

Background

This survey was conducted by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion for the Empire Corridor Rail Task Force and the Empire State Passengers Association. 644 registered voters were interviewed throughout New York State regarding their attitudes toward intercity passenger train service for trips of 75 miles or more one way. The study did not include issues pertaining to subways or commuter rail service.

Households were selected at random in proportion to the voter registration in each county. The interviews were administered by telephone on September 29th and 30th, and October 5th, 1997. Interviewers attempted to contact households between 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on weeknights and from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The demographic factors of education, income, age, race, gender and party registration were collected from respondents.

Nature of the Sample			
Gender		Region	
Men	48%	Upstate	44%
Women	52%	New York City	33%
		Suburbs*	23%
Party		Race	
Democrat	46%	White	79%
Republican	32%	Black	12%
Non-enrolled	15%	Hispanic	6%
Conservative	3%	Asian	2%
Liberal	3%	Other	1%
Other	1%		

* The Suburbs refer to the four counties of Rockland, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk which are outside New York City.

How to Interpret the Numbers

The goal of a scientifically designed survey sample is to be representative of the population which is being surveyed. The results obtained from a scientific probability survey are not just answers from those individuals who responded but, more importantly, because of the design and methods by which the data is collected, can be used to generalize to the population as a whole. For this survey, the results are an estimate of what would have been obtained, within a certain range, if all registered voters throughout New York State were interviewed.

A stratified random digit dial (RDD) probability design was used to draw the telephone numbers for this study. RDD ensures representation of both listed and unlisted telephone numbers. The first eight digits of the sample telephone numbers (which includes the area code, telephone exchange and the first two digits of a phone number within the exchange) are selected based upon estimates of telephone households within each exchange and the proportion of registered voters within the state. The last two digits of the telephone numbers are selected through a random generation. During the course of the interviewing process up to five attempts were made to obtain a completed interview for each telephone number. These callbacks were made on the subsequent evenings and/or at different time periods.

When analyzing the survey results, it should be kept in mind that in all surveys each result is an estimate of what would have been obtained had everyone in the eligible population been interviewed, in this instance, registered voters in New York State. This difference between the responses if all registered voters in New York State had been interviewed and the survey results is referred to as sampling error and is primarily based upon the number of interviews in the survey sample.

The sampling error for the entire sample of 644 respondents is $\pm 4\%$ for percentages near 50% at a confidence level of 95%. The sampling error may be interpreted as indicating the probability (95 times out of 100) within which the results of repeated samplings, in the same time period, assuming the same sampling procedures, could be expected to fall within a certain range. The sampling error diminishes slightly for questions whose results are at the extremes and the sampling error increases as the number of interviews for a particular group or sub-group within the sample declines.

For example, 47% of the 644 registered voters surveyed in the entire sample favor the use of state highway funds to improve intercity passenger train service. We may conclude that there is a high probability

(95 times out of 100) that the average of repeated samplings of registered voters in New York State will fall between 43% and 51%, ($\pm 4\%$). Sampling error increases for sub-groups within the sample. For instance, the sampling error for the 283 registered voters who live in the Upstate region of the state is $\pm 6\%$.

Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

Attitudes Toward Intercity Passenger Train Service

General Attitudes

Overall, New York State’s registered voters are very positive about intercity passenger train service. When asked about the importance and future of long distance train service they overwhelmingly favor continued support and development of this means of transportation.

Opinion on Intercity Passenger Train Service

Question Wording: Some people think that intercity passenger train service such as Amtrak which is mostly used for trips of 75 miles or more should be eliminated because it is old fashioned and costs too much. Others feel that trains used for long distance travel should be improved and modernized because trains relieve highway and airport congestion and reduce pollution. Which position comes closer to your opinion, should intercity passenger train service be eliminated, or should it be improved and modernized?

	Eliminated	Improved & Modernized	Neither (volunteered)	Unsure
Registered voters	1%	97%	1%	1%

Observations:

- There is overwhelming support for the improvement and modernization of intercity passenger train service among New York State’s registered voters.
- Support is extensive across all regions of the state and among voters regardless of political party affiliation.

Importance of Intercity Passenger Train Service

Question Wording: Overall, do you think that having an improved and modernized intercity passenger train service throughout New York State is more important, less important, or just as important as having good highways and airports?

	More Important	Less Important	Just as Important
Registered voters	12%	18%	70%
Region			
Upstate	7%	23%	70%
New York City	19%	13%	68%
Suburbs	9%	17%	74%
Party			
Democrat	17%	13%	70%
Republican	6%	24%	70%
Non-enrolled	7%	16%	77%
Train Usage			
User	21%	11%	68%
Non-user	9%	22%	69%

Observations:

- The overwhelming majority of registered voters think that having improved long distance train service is just as important as having good highways and airports.
- Voters in all regions of the state regardless of their political party affiliation see improving and modernizing intercity passenger train service as just as important as good highways and airports.
- Although train users are somewhat more likely than non-users to think that it is more important to improve intercity passenger train service than to have good highways and airports, more than two-thirds of both groups think that having good long distance train service is just as important as other means of transportation.

New York State's Role and Intercity Passenger Train Service

Question Wording: Several states have chosen to use some of their state funds to improve intercity passenger train service for trips of 75 miles or more. Do you strongly support, support, oppose, or strongly oppose, New York State using more money to improve intercity passenger train service?

	Strongly Support	Support	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Registered voters	26%	61%	10%	3%
Region				
Upstate	28%	58%	10%	4%
New York City	25%	62%	9%	4%
Suburbs	23%	66%	11%	0%
Party				
Democrat	27%	61%	9%	3%
Republican	24%	61%	12%	3%
Non-enrolled	26%	66%	7%	1%

Observations:

- Most New York voters support the use of state funds to improve long distance train travel.
- Registered voters across the state and across party lines are in agreement.

Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

New York State Funding for Intercity Passenger Train Service

Sources of Funding

New York State's registered voters differ in their views about how to raise money to fund intercity passenger train service. The funding approach for improving and modernizing train service which has the most support is the borrowing of money through a state bond issue. New York's voters are divided over taking existing money from state highway funds for this purpose, and they oppose increasing the state's gasoline tax by a penny a gallon.

A State Bond Issue

Question Wording: Would you definitely favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or definitely oppose borrowing money through a state bond issue?

	Definitely Favor	Somewhat Favor	Somewhat Oppose	Definitely Oppose
Registered voters	21%	36%	19%	24%
Region				
Upstate	19%	33%	20%	28%
New York City	22%	39%	19%	20%
Suburbs	24%	35%	18%	23%
Party				
Democrat	26%	33%	20%	21%
Republican	13%	40%	19%	28%
Non-enrolled	17%	35%	20%	28%
Train Usage				
User	27%	33%	15%	25%
Non-user	18%	36%	20%	26%

Observations:

- This is the only means of funding intercity passenger train service which received majority support from voters.
- Although a majority of voters in each region of the state favors a state bond issue as a funding source, support is greater in New York City and its Suburbs than it is Upstate.
- A majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Non-enrollees support this idea. Democrats are more favorable.
- Both train users and non-users support this means of funding. Train users are more supportive.

Existing State Transportation Funds

Question Wording: Would you definitely favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or definitely oppose taking existing state funds from highways or other forms of transportation?

	Definitely Favor	Somewhat Favor	Somewhat Oppose	Definitely Oppose
Registered voters	18%	29%	22%	31%
Region				
Upstate	16%	28%	22%	34%
New York City	17%	33%	22%	28%
Suburbs	21%	26%	23%	30%
Party				
Democrat	17%	29%	23%	31%
Republican	17%	26%	27%	30%
Non-enrolled	17%	35%	15%	33%
Train Usage				
User	17%	33%	19%	31%
Non-user	19%	27%	23%	31%

Observations:

- New York voters are divided over whether existing state transportation funds should be used for intercity passenger train service.
- Upstate opposes this means of funding. Suburban voters oppose it as well, but less so. New York City voters are evenly divided.
- Republicans oppose using existing transportation monies to fund improvements in long distance train service. A majority of Democrats do as well. Those voters who are not enrolled in a political party are divided, although a majority of these Non-enrollees support the idea.
- Non-users of intercity train service are more likely to oppose this source of funding than are train users, who are split on the idea.

The State Gas Tax

Question Wording: Would you definitely favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or definitely oppose increasing the state gasoline tax by a penny a gallon?

	Definitely Favor	Somewhat Favor	Somewhat Oppose	Definitely Oppose
Registered voters	18%	20%	14%	48%
Region				
Upstate	14%	17%	16%	53%
New York City	22%	22%	14%	42%
Suburbs	20%	22%	11%	47%
Party				
Democrat	19%	19%	13%	49%
Republican	16%	22%	13%	49%
Non-enrolled	20%	16%	17%	47%
Train Usage				
User	26%	19%	17%	38%
Non-user	16%	20%	13%	51%

Observations:

- New York voters oppose raising the gasoline tax by a penny a gallon to fund intercity passenger train service.
- This pattern is especially pronounced Upstate.
- Voters, regardless of party affiliation, oppose the idea.
- Even though train users are less negative about this source of funding than non-users, a majority of both groups oppose an increase in the gasoline tax.

Priority for Funding

Question Wording: If you had to choose one, do you think state money to improve intercity passenger train service should come from raising the state gasoline tax by a penny a gallon, taking existing monies from highways or other forms of transportation, or borrowing money through a state bond issue?

	State Bond Issue	Take Highway Monies	Raise State Gas Tax	Other	Unsure
Registered voters	37%	27%	27%	6%	3%
Region					
Upstate	37%	26%	26%	8%	3%
New York City	37%	28%	27%	5%	3%
Suburbs	36%	28%	31%	4%	1%
Party					
Democrat	42%	26%	23%	6%	3%
Republican	31%	28%	30%	8%	3%
Non-enrolled	34%	32%	29%	4%	1%
Train Usage					
User	34%	25%	37%	2%	2%
Non-user	38%	29%	24%	6%	3%

Observation:

- A plurality of all groups, except for train users, think that borrowing through a state bond issue is the preferred means of funding intercity passenger train service among the three possible funding sources.

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Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

Usage of New York State Intercity Passenger Train Service

Train Travel by New York State's Registered Voters

Among registered voters who have taken a long distance trip in the past year,* a significant number have traveled by train. In addition, most voters would consider using trains for their next trip. Among the changes that voters would like to see in long distance train travel are better schedules and performance, lower fares, improved onboard service and comfort, improved stations, and extended service to new destinations.

Train Usage

Question Wording: How many trips of 75 miles or more, one way from home, have you or a member of your household taken by train in the past twelve months? (Asked of those who traveled in the past year.)

	Traveled by Train	Traveled by Other Conveyance
Registered voters	27%	73%
Region		
Upstate	19%	81%
New York City	35%	65%
Suburbs	29%	71%

Observations:

- 27% of those voters who have taken a long distance trip in the past year did so by train.
- Voters who reside in New York City and its surrounding Suburbs are more likely to use intercity passenger train service for long distance travel than are voters who live Upstate.

* 81% of New York State's registered voters indicated that they had traveled at least 75 miles or more one way from home in the past year.

- Among those voters who have traveled 75 miles or more by train in the past year, 55% have done so one or two times, and 45% have done so three or more times.

Potential Market for Intercity Passenger Train Service

Potential Train Users

Question Wording: Thinking about the next time you or someone in your household plans a trip that is 75 miles or more, one way from home, would you definitely consider traveling by train, possibly consider it, or would you definitely not consider traveling by train?

	Definitely Consider	Possibly Consider	Definitely Not Consider
Registered voters	23%	50%	27%
Region			
Upstate	22%	49%	29%
New York City	27%	49%	24%
Suburbs	20%	50%	30%
Party			
Democrat	24%	47%	29%
Republican	21%	46%	33%
Non-enrolled	23%	61%	16%
Age			
18 - 30 years old	21%	65%	14%
31 - 60	23%	50%	27%
Over 60	22%	36%	42%
Train Usage			
User	40%	49%	11%
Non-user	17%	49%	34%

Observations:

- The potential market for intercity passenger train service is great. 73% of voters would consider taking a train on their next long distance trip.
- This view is held by voters throughout all regions of the state and regardless of party affiliation, especially among Non-enrolled voters.
- Registered voters of all age groups are positive toward train travel although voters over 60 years of age are somewhat more reluctant to consider traveling by train.
- 89% of voters who have traveled a long distance by train in the past year would consider doing so again.
- 66% of voters who have not traveled by train in the past year would consider doing so for their next long distance trip.

Desired Improvements to Train Travel

Question Wording: What one improvement would make you more likely to travel by train on your next trip of 75 miles or more? (Asked of those who would definitely or possibly consider using a train for their next long distance trip.)

Better Schedules & Performance	24.0%
• Faster trains	8.7%
• More frequency	7.9%
• On time performance	5.0%
• More direct routes	2.4%
Lower Fares	19.8%
Better Onboard Service & Comfort	19.6%
• Improved comfort	6.7%
• Safer trains	3.6%
• More modern train cars	3.1%
• Better onboard service	1.8%
• Cleaner restrooms	1.6%
• Child friendly	0.6%
• Handicapped access	0.5%
• Improved food bar	0.5%
• Cleaner trains	0.4%
• Friendlier employees	0.2%
• Improved air conditioning/heat	0.2%
• Smoking areas	0.2%
• Computer access	0.2%
Better Stations	14.9%
• Safer stations	7.0%
• Cleaner stations	3.6%
• Station location	2.0%
• Access to/from station	1.9%
• Better parking	0.4%
Extend Service to New Destinations	10.2%
Other	8.7%
Nothing	2.8%

Observations:

- Topping the list is better scheduling and performance which includes faster, more frequent and reliable service, followed by lower fares.
- Lower fares is cited by more voters than any other single item.

Desired Improvements to Train Travel by Region, Age, and Train Usage

	Better Schedules/ Performance	Lower Fares	Better Onboard Service/ Comfort	Better Stations	Extend Service	Other	None
Region							
Upstate	27%	18%	13%	14%	14%	11%	3%
NYC	22%	21%	27%	14%	5%	9%	2%
Suburbs	21%	21%	22%	18%	11%	4%	3%
Age							
18 - 30	14%	26%	24%	14%	8%	13%	1%
31 - 60	29%	20%	18%	15%	9%	7%	2%
Over 60	20%	9%	15%	18%	24%	10%	4%
Train Usage							
User	33%	19%	23%	13%	2%	7%	3%
Non-user	20%	18%	16%	17%	16%	10%	3%

Observations:

- Upstate voters who would consider using trains for their next long distance trip most often mention better schedules and performance as the improvement they would like to see in intercity passenger train service. In New York City, voters most often mention onboard service and comfort, and in the suburbs, voters are divided among several improvements.
- For younger voters lower fares are a top priority, among middle-aged voters better schedules and performance tops the list, and for older voters extended service is most often mentioned.
- Train users would most like to see better schedules and performance and non-users divide among many concerns.

Main Reason Why Some Will Not Travel by Train

Question Wording: What is the main reason why you would not consider traveling by train on a trip of 75 miles or more? (Asked of those who would definitely not consider using a train for their next long distance trip.)

Prefer Other Means	22.4%
• Prefer to drive	18.6%
• Prefer to fly	2.2%
• Prefer other means	1.6%
Schedules & Performance	17.5%
• Trains too slow	14.7%
• Need more frequency	1.8%
• Poor on time performance	0.5%
• Need more direct routes	0.5%
Doesn't Go to My Destination	11.9%
Improve Stations	10.8%
• Access to/from station	4.6%
• Need car at destination	3.9%
• Stations not safe	1.3%
• Dirty, poorly maintained stations	1.0%
Just Not Convenient	10.2%
Lower Fares	9.3%
Improve Onboard Service & Comfort	8.9%
• Trains not safe	3.1%
• Not comfortable	1.7%
• Dirty, poorly maintained trains	1.6%
• Handicapped access	1.0%
• Air conditioning/heat	0.5%
• Not child friendly	0.5%
• Trains are too old	0.5%
Other	9.0%

Observations:

- Voters who would not consider taking a train on their next long distance trip most often mention a preference for other modes of transportation, especially driving, followed by problems with train schedules and performance.

Why Some Will Not Travel by Train by Region and Age

	Prefer Other Means	Sched./ Performance	Not My Destination	Stations	Not Convenient	Lower Fares	Serv./ Comfort	Other
Region								
Upstate	17%	22%	18%	8%	11%	12%	3%	9%
NYC	30%	13%	5%	8%	9%	9%	16%	10%
Suburbs	24%	14%	9%	20%	11%	4%	11%	7%
Age								
18 - 30	33%	14%	9%	15%	13%	12%	0%	4%
31 - 60	15%	20%	14%	8%	11%	11%	11%	10%
Over 60	37%	14%	8%	15%	4%	5%	9%	8%

Observations:

- A preference for other means of long distance travel is most often mentioned by voters in New York City and its Suburbs. Upstate concerns about schedules and performance, lack of train service to specific destinations, and a preference for other modes of transportation are most often cited as reasons not to travel by train.
- For younger and older voters travel by other means of transportation tops the list. Middle-aged voters divide among a number of issues and concerns about intercity passenger train service.

Intercity Passenger Train Service Survey

Areas of Improvement for Intercity Passenger Train Service

Rating Specific Areas of Train Service

This final section examines voters' views on the importance of many specific improvements to intercity passenger train service. The entire sample of registered voters responded to each of these questions. This is in contrast to the previous section which asked voters who travel for their top concern and then separately discussed these issues among travelers who would consider using rail service on their next long distance trip and travelers who would not consider using rail service.

Importance of Improvements

Question Wording: I'm going to read to you a list of improvements to intercity train service. For each one, please tell me if it is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all to you in deciding whether to take a train on trips of 75 miles or more, one way from your home?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Cleaner & better maintained stations	60%	31%	5%	4%
Lower fares	57%	29%	8%	6%
Better on time performance	57%	27%	10%	6%
More frequent trains on existing routes	37%	40%	15%	8%
Having more information about where trains go	48%	29%	13%	10%
Connecting buses, vans, or rental cars to get you to or from the railroad station	46%	30%	12%	12%
Faster trains on existing routes	28%	41%	17%	14%
Extending train service to places it doesn't go	33%	35%	19%	13%

Observations:

- New York State voters value highly many possible improvements to intercity passenger train service. Each of the areas presented are rated as very important or somewhat important by a majority of those interviewed.
- Topping the list is cleaner and better maintained railroad stations. In addition to cleaner and better maintained stations, a majority of voters rate lower fares and better on time performance as very important.

Improvements Among Voters Between 18 and 30 Years Old

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Cleaner & better maintained stations	64%	33%	3%	0%
Lower fares	64%	25%	11%	0%
Better on time performance	59%	28%	9%	4%
More frequent trains on existing routes	44%	42%	13%	1%
Having more information about where trains go	49%	35%	13%	3%
Faster trains on existing routes	39%	41%	15%	5%
Extending train service to places it doesn't go	29%	47%	17%	7%
Connecting buses, vans, or rental cars to get you to or from the railroad station	41%	33%	16%	10%

Observations:

- Registered voters between the ages of 18 and 30 rate improvements to intercity train service in much the same way as the electorate as a whole.
- Access to and from the railroad station is ranked eighth in this age group compared to a slightly higher ranking among all registered voters.
- Faster trains are ranked higher among those voters between 18 and 30 compared to voters who are over 30.

Improvements Among Voters Between 31 and 60 Years Old

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Cleaner & better maintained stations	58%	33%	4%	5%
Lower fares	57%	31%	6%	6%
Better on time performance	57%	25%	11%	7%
Connecting buses, vans, or rental cars to get you to or from the railroad station	46%	32%	10%	12%
More frequent trains on existing routes	34%	42%	16%	8%
Having more information about where trains go	47%	27%	15%	11%
Extending train service to places it doesn't go	37%	31%	19%	13%
Faster trains on existing routes	26%	41%	17%	16%

Observations:

- Among registered voters between the ages of 31 and 60 each area of improvement is again rated highly.
- Connecting transportation to and from the train station ranks fourth among this group.
- Although rated high in importance, among this age group faster trains rank last.

Improvements Among Voters Over 60 Years Old

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Cleaner & better maintained stations	61%	22%	10%	7%
Better on time performance	51%	32%	10%	7%
Having more information about where trains go	54%	27%	4%	15%
Lower fares	44%	32%	9%	15%
Connecting buses, vans, or rental cars to get you to or from the railroad station	57%	16%	14%	13%
More frequent trains on existing routes	36%	29%	20%	15%
Extending train service to places it doesn't go	24%	41%	16%	19%
Faster trains on existing routes	19%	43%	19%	19%

Observations:

- Registered voters over the age of 60 also rate each area of improvement as important.
- Cleaner and better maintained stations and better on time performance top the list for this age group.
- Having more information about where trains go ranks higher among those over 60 years of age compared to the electorate as a whole.