

# Intercity Rail Rides Solid Track of Growth

## Ridership, Farebox Collections Up for Caltrans-Supported Amtrak Service in State

California's intercity rail service, supported by Caltrans, continues to show upward trends for on-time performance, ridership, and farebox collections, and the system is poised for more progress with an influx of dollars from the Road Repair and Recovery Act of 2017 (Senate Bill 1).

Caltrans oversees the Pacific Surfliner (San Luis Obispo-Los Angeles-San Diego), Capitol Corridor (Auburn-Sacramento-Bay Area), and the San Joaquins (Oakland/Sacramento-Fresno-Bakersfield) routes, which last year carried almost 5.76 million riders to their in-state destinations.

Rolling under the [Amtrak California](#) banner, the intercity rail service's three lines have posted steady ridership increases since 2014. The Surfliner, with its heavy commuter mix, particularly on the Orange County to Los Angeles route, accounted for more than half of the entire system's ridership with more than 3 million customers in 2017.

The Capitol Corridor was Caltrans' next most popular intercity rail line, drawing more than 1.63 million riders last year. The San Joaquins that traverse the Central Valley and connect with Sacramento and the Bay Area attracted almost 1.12 million passengers in 2017.

The combined system posted ridership increases of 2.7 percent from 2014 to 2015, 2.2 percent from 2015 to 2016, and 2.4 percent from 2016 through the end of 2017.

### California Amtrak lines among nation's most traveled routes

With those results, Caltrans-funded intercity rail has continued to solidify its place as one of the nation's most popular passenger rail services. The Surfliner ranked second in ridership among all Amtrak routes nationally in 2016, trailing only the Northeast Corridor (Boston to Washington, D.C.) service. The Capitol Corridor was the nation's third most-traveled route, while the San Joaquins ranked sixth.

According to the [2018 California State Rail Plan](#), ridership on California intercity rail lines comprised 38



*The Caltrans-sponsored San Joaquins train, shown here at the Sacramento Valley Station, connects the Central Valley and Bay Area.*

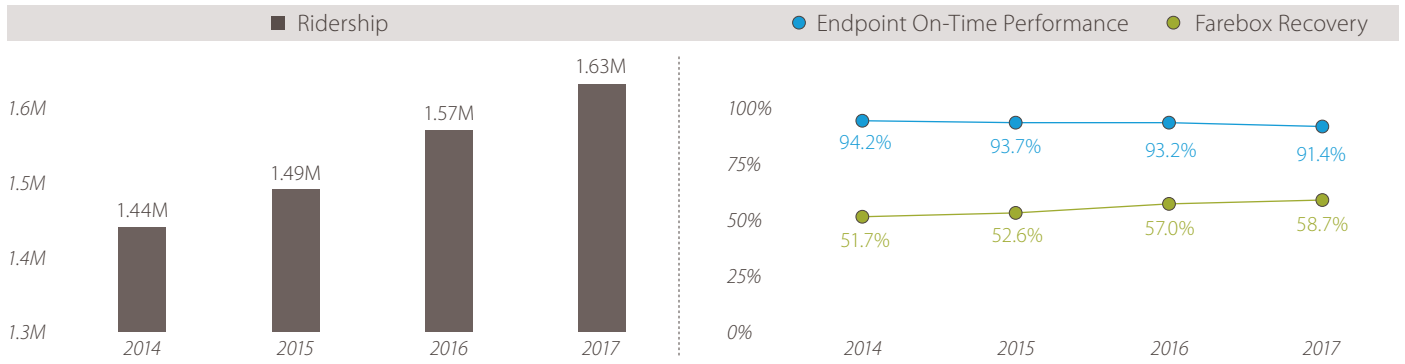
percent of all state-supported passenger train travel in the nation in 2016. The report also says three of the country's 10 busiest Amtrak stations are in California: Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Diego.

In addition to posting ridership gains, the intercity rail system has made strides in other important performance categories. Combined revenue from all three lines rose to almost \$158 million in 2017, a 10.2 percent increase from 2014's \$143.36 million total.

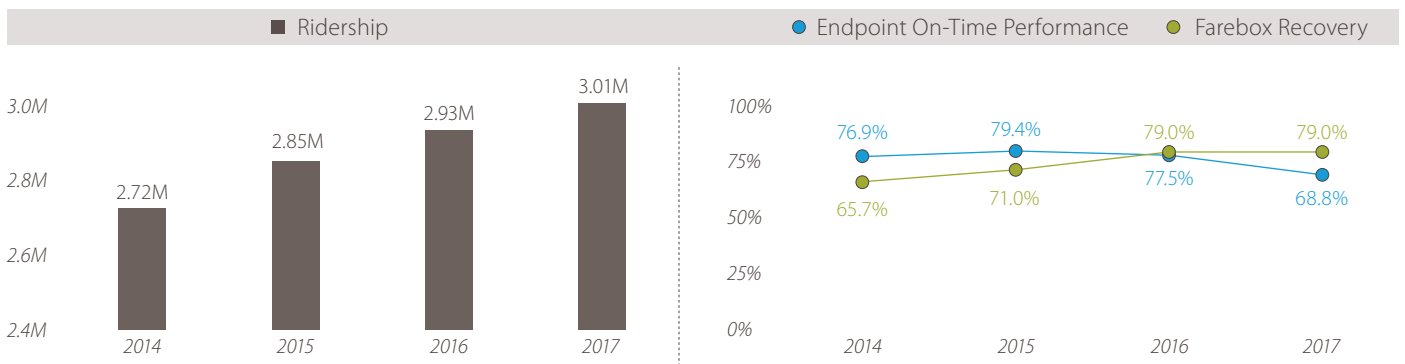
Higher ridership has in turn raised farebox recovery ratios that covered 64.5 percent of the system's total expenses in 2017. The Surfliner led the way with a 79 percent farebox recovery rate in 2017, a marked increase from 2014's 65.7 percent showing. The Capitol Corridor saw a 58 percent farebox collection in 2017, posting gradual increases since 2014's 51.7 percent rate, while the San Joaquin's farebox recovery of 49.3 percent last year was little changed from 2014's 48.3 percent rate.

The federal government sets a 50 percent standard for Amtrak farebox collections. By comparison, the California

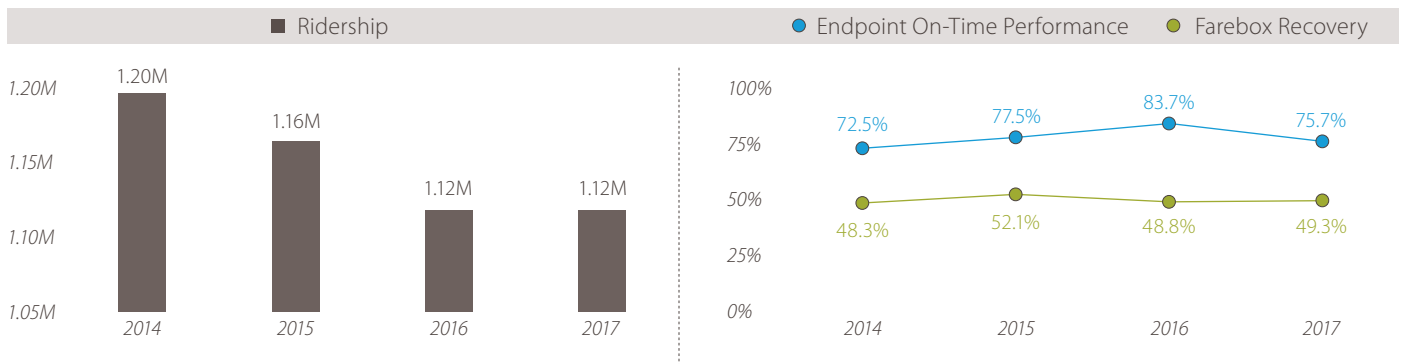
## Capitol Corridor



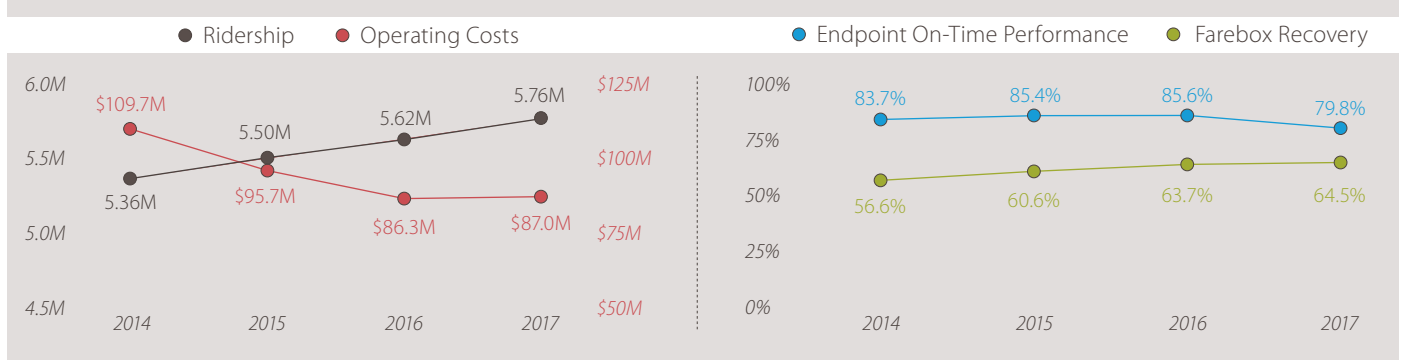
## Pacific Surfliner



## San Joaquins



## Entire System



system now pays for almost two-thirds of its total expenses with customer fares and associated revenues, such as diner car service.

Public subsidies make up the difference, but less so recently for the Amtrak California line. Caltrans' subsidy to the system was about \$110 million in 2014; it dropped to \$86.97 million last year due to increased fare collections and cost controls.

## Caltrans has set 90 percent on-time, end station goal for routes

The intercity rail's on-time record is monitored by Caltrans as part of its 2015-2020 Strategic Management Plan in the system performance category. A 90 percent on-time goal has been established for arrivals at all stations along a particular route, along with a separate target for end stations — a train's final destination.

The Capitol Corridor racked up the best on-time end station record, 91.4 percent, in 2017, and has averaged 93.1 percent since 2014. The Pacific Surfliner managed a 68.8 percent on-time end station performance last year, and cumulative 75.6 percent mark in previous four years. The San Joaquins arrived at their end stations 75.7 percent of the time in 2017, with a 77.4 percent overall on-time record.

The all-stations on-time record is spottier. Amtrak has only maintained those numbers since July 2016, with gaps in reporting. In the latest report period, the Capitol Corridor notched the best on-time, all-stops average, 87.7 percent, with the Surfliner posting an 83.2 percent on-time record and the San Joaquin 73.7 percent.

The route performances of the three lines also depends on a unique operating agreement.

Day-to-day governance is performed by area transportation agencies that have formed joint powers authorities (JPA) for each of the three services. These JPAs contract with Amtrak to conduct the actual operation of the intercity rail services. Caltrans contracts separately with Amtrak to operate and maintain the fleet.

Caltrans supports the JPAs with long-range planning, capital project development and delivery, and most of the rolling stock — the locomotives and coaches used for the three services. Through a variety of funding sources, including the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP), the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and additional bond and SB 1 programs, Caltrans is developing projects to improve the speed, frequency, and reliability of these services. *(See following story.)*

## Cleaner, more powerful locomotives joining intercity fleet

Major equipment upgrades are expected soon to help improve overall performance. Caltrans and its partners are expecting delivery of 16 more new generation locomotives by the fall of 2018, joining the first six engines that arrived in 2017. The Charger locomotives, built by Siemens Mobility in Sacramento, meet strict new federal emissions rules while delivering more power. The Chargers will replace most of the older existing locomotive fleet.

New revenues from SB 1 will pay for more upgrades to the intercity rail system. In addition to state highway and local road repair funding, the new law directs a projected \$275 million yearly into the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program to modernize public transit systems, increase ridership, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve safety.

## Positioned for future growth

It's part of the plan to more fully utilize the passenger rail system and prepare it for future growth. If allowed to develop at its present pace, ridership would grow gradually to an estimated 161,000 daily trips by 2040, the draft State Rail Plan forecasts.

But the system has the capacity to carry 1.3 million daily passengers by 2040, the plan says, if train service is expanded, upgraded, and integrated with local transit and other modes. That represents a 6.8 percent share of the daily passenger miles logged by all modes of travel in California — about 20 times more than the .34 percent share that rail captures now.

In coaxing people from their cars, the state would see a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Such a shift would remove more than 13 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually — the equivalent of planting more than 166 million urban trees each year.

Congestion on the State Highway System also should lessen if more travelers chose rail over vehicles, according to the rail plan, which also touts the inherent safety benefits of railroad travel as compared with driving. **MM**

**Sources:** Kyle Grading, Assistant Division Chief, Caltrans Division of Rail & Mass Transportation; Crystal Ortiz, Rail Transportation Manager I; Ryan Sharpe, transportation planner; 2018 California State Rail Plan



Pacific Surfliner



San Joaquin



Capitol Corridor

Pacific Surfliner	<i>San Diego – Los Angeles – San Luis Obispo</i>
351	Miles covering six Southern California counties, much of it along the Southern California coast.
29	Stations, 17 between San Luis Obispo and Los Angeles, and 12 between Los Angeles and San Diego.
12	Daily round-trips between Los Angeles and San Diego. Five daily trips between L.A. and Santa Barbara/Goleta, two between L.A. and SLO via Santa Barbara. Bus connections to Central Valley, East Bay Area, Las Vegas, smaller communities. Connections to Los Angeles Metrolink, San Diego COASTER and Sprinter commuter trains.
<b>Average travel time</b>	San Diego-L.A., 2 hours, 51 minutes. L.A. to Santa Barbara: 2 hours, 37 minutes. L.A-SLO: 5 hours, 28 minutes.
<b>Administration</b>	Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency (LOSSAN). 11-member board of directors composed of elected officials representing rail owners, operators, and planning agencies along the rail corridor. Joint powers agreement started July 2015.
<b>What's New</b>	Initiation of business class service, in which riders can reserve a seat and enjoy a complimentary snack box with beverage; agreement with Los Angeles Metrolink system to accept Surfliner passes.

San Joaquin	<i>Bay Area/Sacramento – Stockton – Bakersfield</i>
316	Miles between Sacramento/Oakland and Bakersfield, with Amtrak Thruway bus service between Sacramento-Stockton and Sacramento-Bay Area.
13	Stations/stops
7	Daily round-trips; five between Oakland and Bakersfield and two between Sacramento and Bakersfield. Amtrak bus connection from Bakersfield to Los Angeles, with bus connections to Yosemite, Las Vegas, Reno, and Redding, smaller communities.
<b>Average travel time (northbound):</b>	Bakersfield to Oakland, 6 hours, 12 minutes. Bakersfield to Sacramento, 5 hours, 12 minutes. Southbound times vary slightly.
<b>Administration:</b>	San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority. Ten member-agencies make up the JPA, formed in July 2015 as a result of legislation.
<b>What's New:</b>	Launch of a "Morning Express" service that arrives in Sacramento from the Central Valley before 8 a.m., allowing riders to complete business in the capital during the work day, then return home by evening.

Capitol Corridor	<i>Oakland – San Jose – Sacramento – Roseville – Auburn</i>
169	Miles from the Sierra Nevada foothills through the capital region to the Bay Area.
15	Weekday round-trips between Sacramento and Oakland; 11 on weekend. Seven daily round-trips between Oakland and San Jose. One daily trip between Sacramento and Auburn. Several Amtrak Thruway bus connections; other buses to South Lake Tahoe/Reno, Central Coast, Redding.
<b>Average travel time:</b>	Sacramento to Oakland, approximately two hours each way. Oakland to San Jose, 1 hour, 4 minutes east, slightly longer west.
<b>Administration:</b>	Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority. The first intercity rail JPA formed in 1998. Board consists of two representatives from each of the eight counties along route. Bay Area Rapid Transit provides day-to-day management support under contract.
<b>What's New:</b>	The opening of service to Vacaville.