

120th CONGRESS

1st Session

H.R. 1

To empower a first-class, high-frequency American regional rail system through voluntary, technology-driven modernization that guarantees equitable service expansion, uninterrupted access to essential mobility for all communities, and environmental sustainability, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

January 3, 2027

Mr. _____ (for himself, Mrs. _____, and Mr. _____) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and in addition to the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Judiciary, and Oversight and Accountability, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

A BILL

To empower a first-class, high-frequency American regional rail system through voluntary, technology-driven modernization that guarantees equitable service expansion, uninterrupted access to essential mobility for all communities, and environmental sustainability, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “American First-Class Rail Modernization Act of 2027”.

SECTION 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that

- 1 Passenger rail systems engaged in interstate commerce constitute essential infrastructure within the meaning of Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, as originally understood to empower Congress to regulate the channels and instrumentalities of trade among the States, consistent with historical precedents such as the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887;
- 2 The ability of individuals to access employment, education, healthcare, and civic life without unreasonable obstruction is a foundational component of a free society, promoting personal liberty and equal opportunity for transit-dependent and underserved communities;
- 3 Federal mandates requiring Positive Train Control and modern signaling systems have fundamentally altered the safety and operational profile of passenger rail;

- 4 Peer democracies operating under modern signaling standards achieve higher frequency, reliability, and accessibility with technology-aligned staffing models, enabling efficient, market-responsive operations without prescriptive government interference;
- 5 Service disruptions disproportionately harm low-income workers, essential personnel, and transit-dependent communities, exacerbating inequality and hindering economic mobility;
- 6 Congress possesses both the authority and responsibility to ensure continuity, modernization, and freedom of movement within interstate passenger rail, while respecting states' rights and avoiding compulsion of labor or new federal expenditures;
- 7 High-frequency operations require robust infrastructure maintenance to sustain reliability and safety, with costs scaling proportionally to usage;
- 8 Integrated intermodal systems enhance equitable access by enabling seamless transitions across modes, as demonstrated in peer systems.

TITLE I: ESSENTIAL MOBILITY AND RIDER BILL OF RIGHTS

SEC. 101. CONTINUITY OF ESSENTIAL PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE.

- (a) Passenger rail service providing commuter or regional transportation engaged in interstate commerce shall be deemed essential mobility infrastructure.
- (b) No labor action may intentionally and completely suspend such service without exhaustion of all mediation procedures provided under the Railway Labor Act.
- (c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to compel any individual to work or to prohibit voluntary labor organization, nor to infringe on the right to freely associate or bargain.

SEC. 102. FEDERAL PREEMPTION FOR CONTINUITY PURPOSES.

Federal law governing essential passenger rail continuity shall supersede any State or local provision that prevents the maintenance of baseline service levels necessary to preserve interstate commerce and individual access to employment, provided that such preemption is narrowly tailored to interstate activities and does not extend to purely intrastate operations.

TITLE II: GREEN FREQUENCY GUARANTEE

SEC. 201. TECHNOLOGY-ALIGNED SAFETY COMPLIANCE.

(a) Passenger rail systems operating with certified Positive Train Control shall be deemed compliant with federal safety requirements through performance-based outcomes rather than prescriptive staffing rules, allowing operators the liberty to innovate and optimize for efficiency.

(b) No federal rule shall require a specific number of onboard personnel where safety outcomes are satisfied.

SEC. 202. RING-FENCED SERVICE EXPANSION.

(a) Any operational savings achieved through technology-aligned compliance shall be reserved exclusively for service expansion and associated infrastructure maintenance, without requiring new federal funds.

(b) Such funds shall be used solely to achieve all-day service intervals of not more than 15 minutes per line, promoting sustainable, high-frequency transit that reduces carbon emissions and empowers communities, while ensuring track and equipment upkeep proportional to increased usage.

TITLE III: PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY SOVEREIGNTY

SEC. 301. INTEGRATED COMMUTER CORRIDORS.

- (a) The Secretary of Transportation shall recognize Integrated Commuter Corridors operating under unified signaling and safety standards, on a voluntary basis for participating entities.
- (b) Such corridors may utilize modern, lightweight passenger equipment interoperable with existing rights-of-way, respecting private property rights and existing contracts.
- (c) To facilitate lightweight equipment, the Secretary may grant waivers for temporal or physical separation from freight operations where safety is demonstrated, consistent with existing Federal Railroad Administration practices.

SEC. 302. INTERSTATE PRIORITY.

- (a) Public passenger mobility within such corridors shall not be subordinated to fragmented regulatory or private freight interference inconsistent with interstate commerce, as originally empowered under the Commerce Clause to facilitate free trade among the States.
- (b) Freight operators causing delays exceeding established thresholds shall be subject to civil penalties enforced by the Federal Railroad Administration or Surface Transportation Board, with proceeds directed to passenger service improvements.

TITLE IV: CIVIL FARE ENFORCEMENT AND ACCESS EQUITY

SEC. 401. CIVIL FARE INSPECTION.

(a) Transit agencies receiving federal assistance may employ non-police fare inspectors authorized to issue civil citations, to promote fair and equitable enforcement without criminalization.

(b) No criminal penalty shall attach to fare nonpayment under this section.

SEC. 402. FEDERAL FUNDING CONDITIONS.

Participation in this title shall be voluntary and conditioned solely upon acceptance of federal assistance, pursuant to Congress's authority under the Spending Clause, without imposing unfunded mandates.

SEC. 403. INCENTIVES FOR NETWORK PARTICIPATION.

To promote interconnected systems, entities participating in Integrated Commuter Corridors shall receive priority consideration for existing federal grants, encouraging voluntary adoption without compulsion.

TITLE V: INTERMODAL INTEROPERABILITY

SEC. 501. SINGLE-PAYMENT INTERFACE.

- (a) Transit agencies receiving federal assistance are encouraged to implement integrated payment systems allowing seamless ticketing across rail, bus, and other modes.
- (b) Participation shall be voluntary, with federal funding conditioned on adoption of such systems to promote equitable access, pursuant to the Spending Clause.

SEC. 502. TRANSITION PERIOD.

- (a) Titles I and II shall take effect 18 months after enactment.
- (b) Titles III, IV, and V shall apply to grants awarded 24 months after enactment.

SEC. 503. SEVERABILITY.

If any provision of this Act is held invalid, the remainder shall not be affected.