



## ***Solutionary Rail, a people-powered campaign to electrify America's railroads and open corridors to a clean energy future***

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### **RailBite # 9: Solutionary Rail in a Time of Pandemic**

**CoViD-19 is a confluence of crises that further exacerbates inequities & exposes vulnerabilities. It is also an opportunity to undertake a transformational national infrastructure project that delivers climate & environmental justice, improves public health, & rebuilds local & national economic vitality.**

- **CoViD-19 is in part a symptom of the climate emergency.** Climate change is causing a biodiversity crisis that makes it easier for viruses to spread from animals to humans. Fossil fuel emissions are the biggest factor in exacerbating the climate crisis, causing habitat loss and ecosystem degradation. As climate change accelerates, the frequency and severity of pandemics will increase.
- **The CoViD-19 pandemic discriminates according to preexisting conditions.** CoViD-19 is killing rich and poor alike, but communities of color are suffering dramatically higher infection and fatality rates. One factor in this disparity is proximity to the environmental pollution created by high-use highways, mega-warehouse hubs, railway yards, airports, and ports. Living near these pollution centers leads to higher rates of respiratory illnesses and creates disproportionate vulnerability to diseases like CoViD-19.
- **Air travel contributes disproportionately to CO2 emissions and the spread of diseases.** Crowded airplanes and airports are petri dishes for viruses like CoViD-19. Prior to the pandemic, aviation was projected to be responsible for 27% of CO2 emissions by 2050. France is using the CoViD-19 crisis to transition away from shorter distance air travel and invest in railroads rather than bail out airlines.
- **The CoViD-19 pandemic exacerbates economic vulnerabilities.** The globalization of supply chains amplified both the impact of the pandemic and its disruption of national and local economies. Over the last 40 years, domestic manufacturing, as well as food production, has been outsourced and offshored by transnational corporations to maximize profits. Agribusiness has replaced family farms, displacing people and hollowing out once-vibrant communities. Overemphasis of commodity exports has undermined domestic food security and soil health. Critical goods, including safety and medical supplies manufactured outside the country, are unavailable when we need them most. Amidst the pandemic, a historic number of people are unemployed, supply chains interrupted, and state and local governments devastated by the loss of tax revenue to fund basic services. A 2nd Great Depression is imminent.

**It is time for bold solutions. Instead of more Wall Street bailouts, let's transform our national infrastructure to align with domestic resilience, public health and the common good. Investing in an Interstate Rail system is a winning strategy for local and national resilience.**

- **Rail transport and corridors are critical for reversing climate change and bolstering interstate trade.** The current crisis shows us that domestic production and supply chains for food and critical manufactured goods is essential for our nation's resilience. Establishing a robust interstate freight and passenger rail system and co-locating a **national supergrid on those rail corridors** would reduce climate change, rebuild domestic manufacturing and agriculture, bolster local economies, and improve public health.

- **Creating Zero Emissions Zones is an environmental justice priority that can only be achieved by eliminating long haul diesel trucks.** The constant poisoning of fenceline communities with diesel emissions from trucks, ports, railyards and freeways is part of a history of environmental racism that is responsible for the extreme health disparities and higher death rates from the CoViD-19 pandemic. A massive mode shift of freight off long haul trucks and planes onto electrified trains and electric short haul trucks will **greatly reduce climate-heating emissions for everyone and the air pollution that disproportionately impacts communities of color and the urban poor.**
- **Revitalized rail infrastructure creates a critical alternative to aviation and trucking.** Battery-powered trucking for short hauls and the electrification of ports and rail yards are solutions that are already gaining momentum. But these actions cannot address the most harmful aspects of our transportation infrastructure. A massive investment in railroad capacity to **facilitate a dramatic mode shift of long-haul freight (freight traveling 250 miles or more) from trucks to trains is essential for decarbonizing long-distance freight and passenger transport.** Greater utilization of rail, along with the co-location of transmission on rail corridors, will speed the electrification of freight and passenger trains. This dramatic increase in rail capacity will usher in a passenger rail renaissance that replaces most domestic air transport.
- **Increasing the capacity of and access to rail transport for people and freight is key to building a sustainable economy and healthier communities.** Investments in mode shift and electrification will spare tax-payers the expense of truck wear and tear on public roads and bridges. **Getting long haul trucks off the roads will dramatically reduce congestion that costs the US \$166 billion/year in wasted time and fuel.** Especially in rural communities, this will free up resources for other essential services and infrastructure for sustainable transportation, energy, and agriculture. Access to ship by train will open up new opportunities for rural economic vitality.
- **A just transition to a sustainable economy and healthier communities creates good jobs.** Rebuilding our national infrastructure and prioritizing railroads as the preference for long-haul freight, decarbonizing trucks and trains, and guaranteeing access to this infrastructure for rural communities will require an immense investment. The societal benefits of this scale of investment include **the creation of family-wage jobs** across the country, in many fields:
  - Engineering, construction, and maintenance of additional rail capacity, grade separation, and electrification and transmission infrastructure
  - Additional, faster and more frequent trains fully staffed for freight and passenger operations
  - Manufacturing of a green fleet of trains, trucks, and automobiles, and the buildout of the renewable energy sources and transmission to power them
  - Sustainable food production and local manufacturing boosted by investment and access to an efficient transportation infrastructure for small and medium size towns

**CoViD-19 is a wake up call for our elected leaders to prioritize solutions to climate change, health inequities, and supply chain vulnerabilities.** This moment presents us with a historic opportunity to stimulate local economic resilience through investments in a rational, efficient, decarbonized transportation infrastructure. We face an increasing frequency and severity of pandemics if we fail to address their underlying causes, which include climate change. A mode shift from road to rails, renewable energy transmission along the rail corridors, and the decarbonization of long haul transport of people and freight accomplish the most difficult tasks. The time to begin is now.

More on these issues at [www.solutionaryrail.org/video](http://www.solutionaryrail.org/video). Legislators and policymakers have a lot of information to sort through – we hope our “Railbites” will help you gather essential information about modernizing and electrifying our transportation infrastructure. Please use us as a resource! Contact [info@solutionaryrail.org](mailto:info@solutionaryrail.org) or 206-408-8058.