

UNION STATION

Station Facts 2019 • Amtrak Media Relations • MediaRelationsChicago@Amtrak.com

Chicago Union Station is owned by Amtrak, which is formally known as the National Railroad Passenger Corporation. It was created by Congress in 1970 and has operated most of the nation's intercity passenger trains since 1971. Up to 56 Amtrak trains come and go from Union Station every day, with more than 3 million Amtrak customers using the station annually. It is the third busiest rail station nationwide.

Union Station was envisioned by famed Chicago architect Daniel Burnham ("Make no small plans: they have no magic to stir men's blood") and opened in May 1925 for the Chicago Union Station Co. (CUSCo) after ten years of construction at a cost of \$75 million dollars. That would equal more than \$1 billion in 2019 dollars. Burnham died before construction began and the work was completed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, Burnham's successor.

The exterior of the station is clad in Bedford limestone and was quarried in Indiana. Union Station is the only example in the United States of a "double-stub" station, where the 24 tracks approach from two directions and most do not continue under or through the station. The current office tower of the "Headhouse Building" and station façade rises eight stories and occupies a full city block on Canal, Adams and Clinton Streets, with Jackson Boulevard to the south.

CUSCo was formed in 1913 by five railroads that have since been absorbed by other lines and no longer exist as independent firms. The names of the founding railroads are remembered on windows between the Canal Street entrances to Union Station and the Great Hall. CUSCo had been wholly owned by Amtrak since 1984, when the remaining ownership shares were purchased from what are now known as the BNSF and the Canadian Pacific railways. CUSCo was dissolved into Amtrak in 2017.

Originally, Union Station consisted of the current Headhouse west of Canal Street and a "Concourse Building" between Canal Street and the Chicago River. In the 1930s, CUSCo sold the air rights above the tracks to the north and south of the Concourse for the construction of facilities for the Chicago Daily News newspaper and what was then the nation's largest U.S. Post Office. Both buildings have since changed owners and uses.

In 1969, CUSCo sold air rights for the construction of two office buildings. The Concourse Building was then demolished, a mid-20th Century decision that resulted in limited floor space and ceiling height in what is now known as the Concourse Level of the station. A 1991 Concourse Level renovation changed the flow of passenger traffic through the station to separate Amtrak customers from those local passengers using Metra commuter trains, but it has become congested by ridership growth. A [Master Plan process](#) is underway to address the issue.



By the numbers (2018 data):

Amtrak annual ridership: 3.3 million

Metra annual ridership 38.1 million

Amtrak trains annually: 20,336

Metra trains annually: 78,117

Annual train movements: 148,127
(including positioning for departure
or repositioning after arrival)

Historic Skylight length: 219 feet

Height from the floor level: 112 feet

Panes of glass: 2,052 (historic skylight)
858 (protective skylight)



The main physical attraction at Union Station is the Great Hall, with a barrel-vaulted skylight that was blacked-out during World War II to make the station less of a target for enemy aircraft. It was not cleared until 1981. Completed in 2019 was a [\\$22 million project](#) to restore its original colors and make the Great Hall brighter with a restored and protected skylight. Natural light into the Great Hall has increased by about 50%. Two [Henry Hering](#) figural statues tower over the Great Hall on its east wall, one representing day (holding a rooster) and the other representing night (holding an owl), a recognition of the 24-hour nature of passenger railroading.

In 2016, the grand staircases were restored, a new lounge for premium Amtrak customers opened and the Burlington Room event space for not-for-profit galas, corporate receptions, weddings, and casino nights was finished. Commercial activations and other activities are welcomed in and around the Great Hall. For more information, visit [ChicagoUnionStation.com](#), or call 312-655-2481.



In 2011, Amtrak restored air conditioning to the Great Hall and Amtrak passengers now use it as a waiting area. The railroads that had shared ownership of the station abandoned the system that cooled the space in circa 1960.

The southernmost entrance into the Great Hall from Canal Street was used in a memorable scene from the motion picture “The Untouchables.” Tourists from around the world take their own pictures of the grand staircases. Many films and television programs have used the Great

Hall, along with commercials, wedding and engagement photos.

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Union Station is also the largest of the four downtown terminals used by Metra, which is formally known as the Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Rail Corporation. Metra operates commuter rail service between the downtown Chicago and 241 stations in northeast Illinois, on 11 routes covering approximately 500 miles of service territory. Six of Metra's 11 routes operate into and out of Union Station with nearly 130,000 Metra passengers passing through the station on an average weekday and more than 42,000 each weekend. Metra's schedule includes 271 weekday arrivals or departures from Union Station. For more information about Metra, visit [Metrarail.com](#) or call 312-322-6777.

Amtrak Chicago Union Station is the fourth busiest in the Amtrak network, the busiest passenger terminal in Chicago and the most intact of what were once six major downtown Chicago stations. Since 1972, all Amtrak services in Chicago originate and terminate here, fulfilling Burnham's 1909 vision of all intercity trains using the same station without the confusing station transfers, complicated railcar movements, difficult baggage forwarding, and complex ticketing previously endured by generations of travelers.