

## Passenger Services

The Alaska Railroad (ARRC) offers year-round passenger rail transportation with Adventure Class and premium *GoldStar* service. Summer service is mid-May to mid-September; Winter service is mid-September to mid-May.

### Passenger Trains

- **Coastal Classic** – Daily summer service between Anchorage, Girdwood and Seward
- **Glacier Discovery** – Daily summer service between Anchorage, Whittier and Chugach Forest whistle stops at Spencer Glacier and Grandview
- **Denali Star** – Daily summer service between Anchorage, Talkeetna, Denali and Fairbanks
- **Hurricane Turn** – Flagstop service to remote roadless areas: between Anchorage-Hurricane monthly (first Thursday) in winter; and between Talkeetna-Hurricane Thursday-Monday during summer.
- **Aurora Winter** – Winter weekend and some mid-week service between Anchorage and Fairbanks
- **Special Events/Charters** – The *Grandview Cruise Train* is a chartered summer service for cruise company passengers traveling from Whittier or Seward to Anchorage; timed with cruise ship arrivals. Other special event trains include



The Coastal Classic train moves along Turnagain Arm.

the *Nordic Ski Train* chartered to the Nordic Ski Association, ARRC *Holiday Train*, *Easter Train*, *Kids Halloween Train*, *Great Alaska Beer Train*, and the *Hoo Doo Beer Train* and *Family Fun Train* originating in Fairbanks). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, charter and special event trains were all but eliminated in 2020 and into 2021. In 2022 and 2023, ARRC has been taking a phased approach to resuming special event and charter trains, as staffing and market/operational conditions allow.

### Passenger Numbers

Annual ridership is typically about a half-million passengers (see the *ridership graph* on page 2). However, 2020 and 2021 were highly atypical due to the pandemic's devastating impacts to transportation and travel sectors. Numbers below reflect the more typical year in 2019 when ARRC transported 522,101 passengers, in addition to 2022, when ridership continued to rebound with 461,949 passengers (passenger numbers plummeted to 32,069 in 2020, and recovered somewhat to 200,381 in 2021).

In 2022, some cruise activity returned following the pandemic downturn. Customers traveling aboard cruise company-owned railcars pulled by ARRC accounted for about 42% (193,490) of the total passengers in 2022.



Hurricane Turn flag stop service offers remote access.

Stronger recovery emerged for scheduled or special event service aboard Alaska Railroad trains. These 268,459 passengers accounted for 58% of the 2022 total. Of those:

- *Coastal Classic*: 76,123 in 2022
- *Denali Star*: 74,528 in 2022
- *Grandview Cruise Train*: 44,866 in 2022
- *Glacier Discovery*: 49,559 in 2022
- *Aurora Winter Train*: 11,594 in 2022
- *Hurricane Turn*: 7,953 in 2022
- *Special event or Charters*: 3,834 in 2022

ARRC partners with travel businesses to offer transportation, and unique, exciting travel experiences that include lodging, day cruises, adventure activities and sightseeing.

## Customer Service

ARRC capitalizes on homegrown talent and a reputation for hospitality born of Alaska’s frontier spirit. Each year, customer comments underscore the importance of enhanced customer service. A cornerstone of that service is the long-standing Tour Guide Program. In 1981, the Alaska Railroad entered into agreements with local school districts to adopt a vocational curriculum to prepare high school students for jobs and careers in the travel industry. At the end of the school year, the Alaska Railroad hires the cream-of-the-crop to serve onboard summer passenger trains as interactive guides. These Alaskan ambassadors delight railroad customers with interesting narrative, personalized attention and a youthful, infectious excitement to experience rail transportation through Alaska.

Future passenger opportunities may stem from additional transportation services. Over the past two decades, ARRC has continued to invest in rail research and infrastructure that make additional rail service more feasible. This includes new depots at the Anchorage international airport and Palmer fairgrounds, an upgraded intermodal

transportation facility in Ship Creek, and straighter (faster) track between Anchorage and Wasilla.

## Passenger Equipment

ARRC’s passenger service fleet has 45 railcars (excluding locomotives). All are maintained in a state of good repair with the experience and safety of passengers in mind:

- **Business Cars** – The restored *Denali Car* and the *Aurora Car* offer unique meeting space. *Fleet: 2 cars*
- **Diners** – Dining and cafe cars with various seating/dining configurations. *Fleet: 6 cars*
- **Passenger Coaches** – Coaches feature large windows, hand carry storage, and reclining seats facing with a card table in between. Six built in 1989. Five built in 1950 were subsequently updated. *Fleet: 11 cars*
- **Vista Dome Coaches** – Coaches feature 36-38 reclining seats, plus 24 seats under a dome in the middle that offers 360-degree views. Built in mid-1950s and subsequently updated. *Fleet: 6 cars*
- **Low-Level Dome Coaches** – Coaches feature large dome glass windows, and seat (68-76) arranged around four-top tables, small galley and service bar. Four built in the 1950s and subsequently updated. Three built in 2006-2007. *Fleet: 7 cars*
- **Bi-Level Ultradomes** – Double-deck first-class dome cars feature glass-domed upstairs including an outdoor viewing platform and 72 reclining seats. Downstairs includes a full-service kitchen and dining area with 36 seats at tables. Built in 2005, 2007 and 2008. *Fleet: 6 cars*
- **Bi-Level DMU** – The *Chugach Explorer* self-propelled railcar is suited for whistle stop and commuter services, with 112 seats, kitchen and baggage area. Built in 2009. *Fleet: 1 car*
- **Baggage Cars** – Cars store luggage and include generators to supply electrical power to coaches. Built in 1961-62 and subsequently rebuilt. *Fleet: 6 cars*



*Aurora Winter Train ridership has been growing. (photo by David Blazejewski)*

Passenger Ridership (in thousands)

