

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 *Nordic Ski Train* chartered to the Nordic Ski Association, ARRC *Holiday Train*, *Easter Train*, *Kids Halloween Train*, *Great Alaska Beer Train*, the *Hoo Doo Beer Train*, and for 2024, the *Alaska State Fair Train*. Following the pandemic, ARRC took a phased approach to resuming special event and charter trains, as staffing and market/operational conditions allowed.

Passenger Numbers

Annual ridership is typically about a half-million passengers (see *the ridership graph on page 2*). 2023, saw record-high passenger ridership with a total number of 540,329 passengers aboard ARRC coaches. Following significantly reduced pandemic ridership in 2020 and 2021 ridership rebounded in 2022 with 461,949 passengers. In 2022, cruise activity returned following the pandemic downturn, with even stronger results in 2023. Customers traveling aboard cruise company-owned railcars pulled by ARRC accounted for about 45% (244,524) of the total passengers in 2023. In 2022, cruise company-owned railcars served 193,490 passengers.

Stronger recovery emerged for scheduled or special event service aboard Alaska Railroad trains. These 295,805 passengers accounted for 55% of the 2023 total.



Hurricane Turn flag stop service offers remote access.

Of those for 2023:

- Coastal Classic: 76,118
- Denali Star: 78,996
- Grandview Cruise Train: 56,714
- Glacier Discovery: 50,187
- Aurora Winter Train: 11,399
- Hurricane Turn: 8,724
- Special event or Charters: 13,657

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)

