

# UNION STATION

Station Facts 2017 • Amtrak Media Relations • [MediaRelationsChicago@Amtrak.com](mailto:MediaRelationsChicago@Amtrak.com)

Amtrak Chicago Union Station is owned by an Amtrak subsidiary, the Chicago Union Station Company (CUSCo). Amtrak is formally known as the National Railroad Passenger Corporation and was created by Congress in 1970. Amtrak 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. Systemwide, it is the fourth busiest Amtrak station.

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 after ten years of construction at a cost of \$75 million dollars. That would equal more than \$1 billion in 2017 dollars. Burnham died before construction began and the work was completed by the firm 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. The Headhouse can support an overbuild and plans to expand it have been proposed over the years.

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 has been wholly owned by Amtrak since May 1984, when the remaining ownership shares were purchased from what are now known as the BNSF and the Canadian Pacific railways.

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, the predecessor railroads that owned CUSCo sold the air rights above the tracks and platforms of the Concourse for the construction of two office buildings. The Concourse Building was then demolished, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century decision that resulted in limited floor space and ceiling height in what is now known as the Concourse Level of the station. A Master Plan process is underway to address the issue.

The main physical attraction of Great Hall at Union Station is the 219-foot-long barrel-vaulted skylight that soars 115 feet over the room. The skylight ceiling was blacked-out during World War II in order to make the station less of a target for enemy aircraft, since the station served nearly 100,000 daily passengers and more than 300 daily arrivals and departures. 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.

The southernmost entrance into the Great Hall from Canal Street was used in a memorable scene from the motion picture “The Untouchables” and still draws tourists from around the world to take their own pictures of the grand staircase, which has been recently restored. Many films have used the Great Hall, along with television programs.

A 1991 renovation changed the flow of passenger traffic through the station to separate Amtrak customers from those local passengers using Metra commuter trains, so most Metra passengers do not pass through the Great Hall. In 2011, Amtrak restored air conditioning to the Great Hall and Amtrak passengers are able to use it as a waiting area as it was originally intended before 1960, when the railroads that shared ownership of the station abandoned the system that cooled the space.



A new lounge for premium Amtrak customers and a new event space for not-for-profit galas, corporate receptions, weddings, casino nights opened in 2016. Commercial filming or engagement photos are also welcomed. For more information, visit [ChicagoUnionStation.com](http://ChicagoUnionStation.com), or call 312-655-2481,



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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 [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) or call 312-322-6777.

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