

UNION STATION

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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 fourth busiest Amtrak station nationwide.* It is the busiest rail 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 famed Chicago architect Daniel 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.

In a typical year there are more than 147,000 train movements at the station, an average of 409 per day, all controlled by Amtrak. This figure includes about 20,000 Amtrak and 77,000 Metra trains with passengers and 15,000 Amtrak and 35,000 Metra trains being positioned*.



Union Station 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 ("Make no small plans: they have no magic to stir men's blood") died before construction began and the work was completed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, his 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 and station façade rises eight stories and occupies a full city block on Canal, Adams and Clinton Streets, with

Jackson Boulevard to the south.

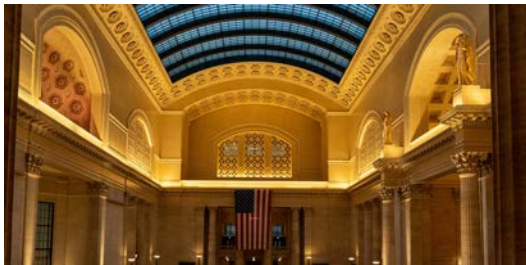
Originally, Union Station consisted of the current "Headhouse Building" west of Canal Street and a "Concourse Building" between Canal Street and the Chicago River. In the 1930s, CUSCo sold the air rights above the tracks to the north and south of the Concourse for the construction of facilities for the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

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 CPKC railways. CUSCo was dissolved into Amtrak in 2017.

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. This is being addressed by CHIP, the Chicago Hub Improvement Program.

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. 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 312-655-2524.



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.

The southernmost Street was used in “The world take their films and Hall, along with photos.



entrance into the Great Hall from Canal a memorable scene from the motion picture *Untouchables*.” Tourists from around the own pictures of the grand staircases. Many television programs have used the Great commercials, wedding and engagement

In 1992, Amtrak purchased a parking structure in the block bordered by Jackson Boulevard, Canal, Clinton and Van Buren Streets, immediately south of the current Headhouse and connected it to the Concourse with an underground pedway. Amtrak sold that property in 2019, as the structure was nearing the end of its useful life. The pedway now serves the Chicago Transit Authority’s Union Station Transit Center, opened in 2016, and the 320 South Canal Building, opened in 2022.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the parking structure created a new Clinton Street entrance to the Headhouse. Circa 1992 art from each of the six levels of that parking structure was saved and now serves as temporary decoration at that entrance.

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*pre-pandemic data from 2019