



A bold voice for transportation workers

THE NECESSARY COMPONENTS OF A LONG-TERM AMTRAK REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Transportation labor has been a leader in insisting on sustainable investment in Amtrak's national network. Throughout the history of Amtrak, whose creation in 1971 followed the bankruptcy of private passenger rail operations, the passenger railroad company has been chronically underfunded. Even worse, for four decades too many politicians have attempted to shutdown Amtrak through bankruptcy budgets or have pushed dangerous privatization proposals at the expense of riders and employees.

Fortunately, those efforts have failed and today there is bipartisan consensus building around a multi-year legislative strategy that preserves Amtrak's national system and the 20,000 middle-class jobs it supports. And for good reason: Amtrak's business is strong and its popularity is soaring. For 10 of the last 12 years Amtrak has broken its ridership record, and in 2014 Amtrak carried almost 31 million passengers and saw a 4 percent rise in ticket revenues. On the Northeast Corridor (NEC), Amtrak carried the most passengers in its history in 2014. Recent polling shows that Amtrak is also enjoying rising popularity with Americans. From Upstate New York to Orlando, FL, from Wisconsin and Iowa to Kentucky, the vast majority of Americans, both Democrats and Republicans, believe that federal funding for Amtrak should be maintained or increased and express support for expanded service.

TTD's Executive Committee has previously endorsed [priorities](#) for Amtrak reauthorization and we have already seen some congressional action to move a multi-year bill this year. Earlier this month the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, under the leadership of Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA), Chairman of the committee, and Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), the Ranking Democrat, passed the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2015 (PRRIA) out of committee. This bipartisan, compromise bill provides a critical reauthorization of Amtrak's funding for the next four years, provides greater certainty to Amtrak and its employees, and gives Amtrak the chance to improve and modernize its network. The legislation also codifies Buy America standards for the purchase of Amtrak's rolling stock and track improvements through the established RRIF financing provisions. And it leaves intact some important worker protections that are important to both rail and construction employees. Most critically, this legislation rejects ill-advised proposals to privatize Amtrak, sell-off pieces of the system, and force the contracting-out of middle-class jobs. In doing so, the legislation affirms the need for a national Amtrak system and rejects discredited proposals designed to break-up the company and leave America with an ineffective and highly balkanized passenger rail network.

The challenge moving forward is to infuse Amtrak with the level and type of funding it needs to meet current and long-term problems. While PRRIA provides stable multi-year funding that largely mirrors current federal appropriations, it falls well short of addressing Amtrak's aging system that needs significant upgrades in infrastructure and speed of service. Reaching higher speeds, replacing and repairing badly deteriorated tunnels and bridges, and increasing Amtrak's capacity will not happen without an infusion of new funds.

This neglect was in the spotlight last October when Amtrak released an alarming report declaring that four of its century-old tunnels into and out of New York City urgently need to be replaced. Storm surges from Hurricane Sandy flooded both tunnels under the Hudson and two of the four tubes under the East River. Repairs can be made to the East River tunnels but of course those repairs will require the shutdown of one tunnel at a time and thus will cascade into massive delays on the NEC. Under the Hudson, however, that option is not available, and replacement tunnels must be constructed to avoid bringing traffic on the nation's busiest rail corridor to a grinding halt. Unfortunately New Jersey Governor Chris Christie canceled an already funded project to build an additional rail tunnel under the Hudson River. This shelved a strategically significant infrastructure project that has resulted in a race against clock. Amtrak's replacement plan, the Gateway Project, would create a new two-track tunnel under the Hudson, allowing increased capacity for the heavily trafficked crossing while also allowing repairs to be done on the existing tunnels. And it will put thousands of workers on the job at a time when unemployment in construction remains near 10 percent. Unfortunately that project lacks approved financing.

Transportation labor will advocate for the following priorities in the PRRIA reauthorization, as part of our effort to make the case for modifications to the bipartisan House bill and whatever version is produced in the Senate:

- Secure higher multi-year funding levels to permit critical infrastructure and expansion initiatives.

- Maintain Amtrak's national system, including the NEC and regional and long-distance trains.

- Provide Amtrak the funds its needs to move forward with the Gateway Project, the NEC Capital Improvement Program, and replacement of Amtrak's badly aging fleet that has exceeded its commercial life.

- Reject contracting-out mandates and attempts to force privatization.

- Safeguard the rights, jobs and wages of front-line rail and construction workers by applying longstanding employee protections.

- Maintain the historic application of rail and labor statutes including the Railroad Retirement Act, the Railway Labor Act and the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act.

- And reject proposals to stifle popular state high-speed rail plans across America.

The bipartisan Shuster-DeFazio Amtrak reauthorization legislation provides an historic opportunity to set in motion a long-term vision for federal passenger rail policy and specifically for the build-out of a modern Amtrak system. Transportation labor will push strongly for a bipartisan bill that doesn't just "do no harm," but actually advances a long-term bill that gives Amtrak and its 20,000 employees the funding and policy certainty they need to deliver on passenger rail service that is in high demand across America – in both red and blue states.

Policy Statement No. W15-06
Adopted February 22, 2015