

TTD NEWS RELEASE

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TTD to FRA: Amtrak, Not Private Entities, Should Run National Passenger Rail System *Pilot Program Bidders Must Comply with All Rules, Rail Statutes*

WASHINGTON, DC — The Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), today urged the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to ensure private entities that bid on long-distance Amtrak routes under the Competitive Passenger Rail Service Pilot Program fully comply with the explicit labor standards and service requirements mandated by Congress.

TTD Secretary-Treasurer Larry Willis, appearing at the Agency's public hearing, emphasized that Amtrak and its experienced employees are in the best position to provide inter-city passenger rail — “not private entities that seek to turn a profit by lowering labor costs or cutting and eroding service.”

“The idea that a private entity can come in and provide more efficient service at a lower cost than Amtrak simply because it is a private entity is a myth,” Willis said. “Too often, private sector business models in the rail industry contemplate downgrading existing service, avoiding obligations under rail labor statutes, or undercutting collective bargaining agreements. The FRA must ensure that the pilot program shuts the door to this misguided model.”

Willis told the FRA that rules and rail specific statutes that apply to Amtrak and its employees must also apply to any provider of rail service under the pilot project. In addition, existing food and beverage service must be maintained or enhanced, and station stops and train frequency must not be cut.

“While we reject the discredited idea that private competitors should be permitted to cherry-pick any of Amtrak's network, we do expect a level playing field if Amtrak is forced to compete with new bidders for long-distance service,” Willis said.

Under the pilot program, which is part of the 2015 FAST Act, the FRA is required to solicit bids from private entities to replace current Amtrak service on up to three long-distance routes. TTD and its rail affiliates led the opposition to this provision. Fortunately, changes were secured in the final legislation that impose rules and conditions barring the applying providers from evading explicit labor and other statutory requirements.

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