



A bold voice for transportation workers

PRO-WORKER PRIORITIES FOR A LONG-TERM AMTRAK REAUTHORIZATION

Whether operating in the dense Northeast Corridor, providing long-distance service that connects rural communities and urban hubs, or partnering with states on regional routes, our intercity passenger rail network is a vital transportation link for millions of people. The service Amtrak provides creates economic growth, reduces congestion on our roadways, and brings the nation closer together.

We have arrived at an important juncture for Amtrak and inter-city passenger rail. Amtrak reauthorization is an excellent opportunity for Congress to ensure that intercity passenger rail supports good jobs, provides customers with an outstanding product, and connects communities through a national and inter-connected network. Unfortunately, Amtrak's current leadership appears focused on outsourcing as much work as possible and walking away from its commitment to long-distance service in a misguided effort to appeal to austerity-driven political forces. We forcefully reject this approach and will fight for Amtrak legislation that provides passengers with safe and efficient service and a rail carrier that both deploys and benefits from a high-road labor model.

Securing Meaningful Funding Increases

Amtrak was last authorized in 2015 as part of the FAST Act. That bill affirmed Amtrak's role as our national passenger rail carrier by providing consistent—though insufficient—funding and rejecting attempts to privatize part or all of the railroad's operations. This Congress should build on the progress made in the FAST Act by increasing Amtrak funding levels, allowing it to both maintain its current operations and make forward-thinking investments in its future. For too long, Amtrak has existed on a meager federal budget that ignores its growing capital needs. Nearly five years after the passage of the FAST Act, Amtrak is still operating over decrepit bridges and decaying infrastructure. Even when Amtrak has been able to make larger investments and upgrades, their benefits are stunted by other problems throughout the system. For instance, Amtrak recently procured new trainsets for the Acela line that are capable of travelling nearly 200 MPH. However, these trains are subjected to 30 MPH restrictions as they pass through the 150-year old Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel that is in desperate need of improvement. Meanwhile, high-priority projects like Gateway, which has the potential to vastly improve service and spur substantial economic growth, are languishing without funding.

The cost of not making these improvements is high. In 2008, DOT's Inspector General estimated that reducing travel between New York and Washington, D.C. by just 30 minutes would result in \$500 million in annual economic benefits. Without dedicated and robust funding, however, these potential economic benefits are merely aspirational. Amtrak cannot become a world-class passenger rail network on a shoestring budget that barely covers simple maintenance. It is up to

Congress to fund Amtrak at levels that will allow for real service improvements, increased accessibility, and a better passenger experience. The adage “you get what you pay for” could not be truer for passenger rail, and unless Congress makes real investments in Amtrak, our system will continue to degrade.

Strengthening Labor Protections and Enhancing the Worker’s Voice

Any Amtrak reauthorization must include important labor protections that support middle-class families and promote fairness and dignity in the workplace. As the operational needs of Amtrak change, and new ways to fund passenger rail are proposed, we must also fortify labor protections and their application to passenger rail workers.

Congress must ensure that Amtrak and passenger railroad employees who are currently covered by rail-specific statutes, including the Railway Labor Act, Railroad Retirement Act and Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, remain so. Collectively, these laws provide employees with the right to collectively bargain, coverage under retirement, occupational disability, and unemployment benefits designed for the railroad industry. Further, when federal grants are used to improve rail lines for intercity passenger service, all employees who perform railroad work traditionally covered under the RLA must continue to receive these benefits and protections. It would be unacceptable for this coverage to be severed for any reason.

Lawmakers must also protect employees who are left vulnerable to contracting schemes, particularly those that violate existing collective bargaining agreements and replace furloughed employees with non-union contractors. Congress should reject Amtrak’s attempts to convert a statutorily-imposed restriction on contracting out into a purported license to contract out regardless of other agreement restrictions.

Amtrak employees who lose employment through no fault of their own must also be provided an adequate safety net. Specifically, existing employee protections should be modified so they apply to affected employees when Amtrak closes a facility, transfers work between facilities, or abandons or sells a line. Amtrak’s actions in the past year show why these changes are necessary. When Amtrak closed its Riverside, Calif. call center, only to move much of that work to a non-union facility, 500 dedicated union workers were forced to choose between uprooting their families to keep their jobs or finding new, lower-wage employment elsewhere. This incident clearly demonstrated that, when faced with management’s bad-faith actions, existing worker protections are not enough.

Additionally, Amtrak is seeking funds to completely replace its locomotives and car fleet. Those acquisitions will significantly affect the employees who maintain Amtrak equipment and they should have the same type of protections as are provided to other transportation workers who are adversely affected by federally financed equipment purchases. Finally, it is critical that traditional requirements like Buy America standards continue to apply to all funds made available to Amtrak and other passenger rail providers.

TTD also strongly opposes proposals to privatize Amtrak service to entities whose supposed cost savings are predicated on avoiding these protections and requirements. In the FAST Act, Congress regrettably authorized a pilot program that would have allowed limited privatized service on certain routes. No entities bid to participate in the program, admitting they could not replicate Amtrak's service and performance. These proposals are only viable when bidders are permitted to reduce service, cut employee benefits, and skirt federal requirements that would otherwise apply to Amtrak. Congress must reject any further efforts at contracting out or privatizing Amtrak service as they begin this process.

In addition to these requirements, Congress can also support workers by adding a labor representative to the Amtrak Board of Directors. Too often, Amtrak makes decisions without adequate input from its workforce. This results in determinations and initiatives that do not reflect the needs of the railroad or of its customers. Congress can rectify this disconnect with a modification of the makeup of the Board.

Preserving the National Network and the Passenger Experience

Just as Amtrak must work for its employees, Amtrak must continue to be a viable and appealing option for travelers. Long-distance routes, subject to undue hostility from both the White House and Amtrak leadership, provide important transportation service for millions of Americans in rural states. The elimination of a truly national network would be catastrophic for the communities that rely on Amtrak's services and would eliminate thousands of good jobs. The concept is also short sighted—many users of long-distance routes use this service to connect to other Amtrak service, like the Northeast Corridor or other regional trains. Cutting these passengers off by shrinking Amtrak's reach only reduces its customer base and overall ridership. Amtrak must continue to operate as a true nationwide intercity passenger rail carrier, and commit to preserving and improving its long-distance service. Further, Congress should use the reauthorization to cement Amtrak's role as a true national passenger rail network as well as the service responsibilities that entails.

This is also an opportunity for Congress to end its micromanagement of Amtrak food and beverage services. The FAST Act included language that directed Amtrak to eliminate the operating losses on its onboard food and beverage service. This shortsighted and burdensome approach degrades the passenger experience, making Amtrak less appealing to current and future customers. Financial benefits gained are outstripped by the financial costs of dissatisfied customers and lower ridership. To date, the provision has not led to meaningful savings, but it has led to management decisions that downgrade the quality of offerings on-board, or in some cases, remove traditional food service entirely. This has frustrated long-time customers and damaged Amtrak's public image. Congress must remove this provision in the next reauthorization.

Similarly, we call on Congress to take action to ensure station agents appropriately staff rural stations. Amtrak's decision to remove these workers from 15 stations, and therefore the ability to purchase a ticket directly from an Amtrak employee, is deeply unpopular with customers. Community letters and petitions requesting the reinstatement of these workers, which Amtrak ignored, evidence this. We note that both chambers have adopted report language in their

respective FY '20 appropriations bills directing Amtrak to reverse its position and to improve its relationship with local partners. Enshrining this position into law would ensure Amtrak does not meddle with this critical customer-facing function.

Improving Safety

Finally, TTD calls for the inclusion of two safety-related provisions. Congress should consider the creation and deployment of a Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C3RS) on Amtrak. C3RS is a voluntary reporting program that allows employees to report close calls without fear of discipline or FRA enforcement. TTD rail unions have long participated in C3RS programs at other railroads and have found them invaluable in improving safety culture in a collaborative fashion.

Congress should also take action to protect workers from violent assault. Assaults against employees are all too common, including the 2017 shooting of an Amtrak conductor onboard a train. Both Amtrak and commuter railroads should be required to develop plans that seek to prevent violence preemptively, deescalate an in-progress event, and help employees manage the aftermath of an assault. Passenger rail employees deserve a safe workplace, and the development of these plans would be a step in the right direction.

As Congress begins to formulate an Amtrak reauthorization, TTD calls for legislation that strengthens Amtrak's network, protects and promotes its workforce, and provides high quality service to the travelling public. We are committed to working with Congress on the development of this legislation and the future of Amtrak.

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