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## **Testimony of**

### **Transport Workers Union of America**

#### **Before the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials**

#### **Hearing titled:**

#### ***"Amtrak Now and Into the Future"***

**November 13, 2019**

Chairman Lipinski, Ranking Member Crawford, and members of the committee, on behalf of the members of the Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO, thank you for the opportunity to discuss issues related to the future of Amtrak and its hard-working employees. The Transport Workers Union represents over 151,000 members across the railroad, airline, transit, universities, utilities and services sectors. The TWU is submitting this testimony on behalf of its Amtrak members.

Amtrak is an essential component of our national transportation system and must be supported, not dismantled, privatized or starved into bankruptcy. Amtrak offers the only national intercity passenger rail service in the U.S., providing a vital transportation link for millions of people across the country. Amtrak's popularity continues to grow, setting a record for ridership in fiscal year 2019 by carrying 32.5 million passengers. Amtrak's 20,000 employees make this service possible. They include the TWU members who work onboard providing food and beverage service to passengers, and in shops as carmen and cleaners, maintaining, repairing and servicing Amtrak cars.

Each year, Congress provides Amtrak with federal funds to support the railroad's operations, infrastructure, and equipment needs. Amtrak uses these funds to provide rail service across the country – to rural, suburban and urban communities – via its

Northeast Corridor, Long-Distance, and State-supported routes. Increasingly, the Administration, some members of Congress, and Amtrak's board have sought to use federal funds to pay contractors to provide core Amtrak services, including onboard services. Amtrak's on-board service workers' main priority is to keep passengers safe. Their job duties are unique and demanding and require intensive training that prepares them to respond to a wide range of potential events, including derailments, medical emergencies, terrorist threats, and fires. On-board workers are the essential eyes, ears, and first responders on the railroad.

These workers also provide food and beverage services -- an essential part of the passenger rail experience and one that many Amtrak customers depend on during their trips.

On board service workers work long, grueling hours. Single shifts on the Northeast Corridor, for example, usually last 12 to 18 hours. On long distance trains, the job functions and environment are even more demanding. During three- to six-day trips, on-board workers generally are on duty for 16 hours each day.

Unlike many workers, on-board employees do not make overtime pay after working eight hours in a day or even 40 hours in a week. It is common for on-board attendants to work 18-hour days with a minimal crew. Efforts to privatize these services in the name of cost savings ignore the unique working conditions onboard Amtrak and the level of specialized training required of the workforce. Outsourcing these jobs will not result in a cheaper, safer workforce -- it will simply undermine passenger safety and the rights of existing workers who have dedicated their careers to the railroad.

Privatization efforts also ignore the fact that passengers don't want the quality of their onboard services to decline. Amtrak has made several attempts in the past to change its onboard service and they always have resulted in a decrease in customer satisfaction.

For instance, the recent change to boxed lunches on long distance trains east of the Mississippi resulted in an online petition in support of traditional dining car service, which has been signed by more than 118,000 riders.

Ultimately, past outsourcing efforts have failed because they have been based on politics rather than on sound business practices. Airlines don't contract out their flight attendants because they know that doing so would diminish customers' experience of their service. Installing vending machines onboard trains or replacing freshly made meals with a boxed lunches results in the same decrease in customer satisfaction and will only hurt the railroad's reputation.

### **Conclusion**

Congress's investment in Amtrak is vital to maintaining a safe and reliable national passenger railroad. It is essential that Amtrak workers, as stakeholders and frontline experts in on-board services, facilities, equipment and on time performance, be involved in discussions about the future of the railroad. Management that seeks to ignore workers' perspectives or that believes it can replace workers with vending machines is undermining its financial performance and endangering the long-term prospects of the railroad. We encourage the committee to exercise the full extent of its oversight powers to bring Amtrak management's goals back into alignment with the broader needs of our American economy and its working families.