



# UNITEHERE!

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby  
 Chairman  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 U.S Senate  
 S-128 The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
 Vice Chairman  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 U.S Senate  
 S-128 The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
 Chairman  
 Subcommittee on Transportation,  
 Housing and Urban Affairs, and  
 Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 U.S Senate  
 184 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
 Ranking Member  
 Subcommittee on Transportation,  
 Housing and Urban Affairs, and  
 Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 U.S Senate  
 125 Hart Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Shelby, Leahy, Collins, and Reed:

The working people who make Amtrak run have long stood with the carrier in fighting to secure the funding it needs to operate a national intercity passenger rail network, capable of serving millions of Americans each year. Our commitment to ensuring the long-term viability of Amtrak has not changed, particularly as it deals with the consequences of COVID-19.

Amtrak has seen its ridership decrease as much as 95%, and where ridership may be greater, it is capping sales at 50% of capacity to promote socially distanced travelling. This loss of revenues threatens its ability to operate. To make up for these losses, Congress provided \$1.1 billion through the CARES Act which allowed Amtrak to meet its obligations and keep its workforce on the payroll and attached to critical benefits, including healthcare.

Recently, Amtrak formally requested an additional \$1.475 billion in supplemental funding for FY'21. Unlike its previous request, Amtrak plans to accept these funds while also eliminating up to 20% of its workforce. We are deeply concerned about what such aggressive cuts mean for Amtrak employees who face losing their jobs during a global pandemic, and for the future of the carrier and the service it provides. As stated, we strongly support Amtrak receiving the funds it needs. However, we call on you to ensure that any supplementary funds are made contingent on the following items:

### **Protecting Amtrak Workers Today**

We reject the proposal that Amtrak should receive additional billions in federal assistance while simultaneously eliminating thousands of jobs, and request that in return for accepting supplementary funds, Amtrak must be prohibited from proceeding with involuntary furloughs.

While Amtrak has many financial needs, these funds must be used to keep employees on payroll, so that they may continue to receive healthcare, provide for their families, and deliver the services our country needs. Keeping these highly skilled and qualified individuals employed at Amtrak also ensures that the critical workforce Amtrak needs to resume service in the future will be available when called upon. It should also be noted that putting thousands of Amtrak workers out of work will simply shift the financial burden to our struggling Railroad Unemployment Insurance system, necessitating added cost to the government without receiving a service in return for its investment.

Per Amtrak's request, it plans to proceed with these cuts to save \$350 million in labor costs. If the amount of its current supplemental request is not adequate to cover these expenses, we call on Congress to ensure that additional funds in this amount are included—and reserved for—payroll expenses.

Finally, we are also deeply skeptical of claims by Amtrak that it can substantially reduce potential layoffs through a proposed voluntary buyout/retirement program. The data we have been presented with is unconvincing based on the size of our unions' Amtrak membership and the amount of those members who would be eligible. Unsurprisingly, thus far we have seen minimal participation in the program. The availability of this option is unequivocally not a replacement for real efforts to keep employees connected to their jobs.

### **Securing Amtrak's Future**

While the human and economic cost of COVID-19 has been monumental to date, demand for passenger transportation will eventually return to pre-pandemic levels. When it does, Amtrak must also do so.

Congress must build on and clarify safeguards contained in Sec. 22002 of the CARES Act to ensure that Amtrak cannot use the pandemic as an excuse to permanently and artificially cut its workforce, eliminate or reduce routes and on-board or other customer services, or replace furloughed Amtrak employees with outsourced contractors. When ridership shows meaningful signs of recovery, Amtrak must reestablish its previous levels of service. We believe strongly that it would be counterproductive for Congress to provide billions in assistance to the carrier only to come out of this crisis with a worse and degraded service for the travelling public.

We urge you to provide Amtrak the supplementary funds it needs to ensure its financial wellbeing through FY'21 and into the future. We also urge you to make sure those funds support the wellbeing of its workforce, and reestablishment of the high-quality and extensive service it provided pre-pandemic. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues concerning Amtrak.

Sincerely,

American Train Dispatchers Association

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes

Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

National Conference of Firemen and Oilers, SEIU

International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers - Mechanical Division

International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers - Transportation

Division Transportation Communications Union/IAM

Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Transport Workers Union of America

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