



August 12, 2022

To: Congresswoman Betty McCollum
661 LaSalle Street, Suite 110
St. Paul, MN 55114.

From: All Aboard Minnesota
P.O. Box 4212
St. Paul, MN 55104
www.allaboardmn.org

Dear Congresswoman McCollum,

This letter requests a meeting with you, or your staff – either remotely or in person at a place of your choosing. All Aboard Minnesota is a non-profit citizen advocacy group that represents more than **2,500 members, friends and supporters throughout the state** that actively seek more rail passenger service statewide as a needed transportation option and which will economically benefit the communities served and the state.

Our purpose is to brief you about the potential of an impending collapse of Amtrak's national passenger train network and actions we believe are necessary to prevent it. The ongoing disintegration in Amtrak's operations this year has the potential to very adversely impact Amtrak's Empire Builder passenger train serving the State of Minnesota. Currently, Amtrak's Empire Builder is the only long distance passenger rail service the State of Minnesota has which also connects us to the Mid-west and west coast.

Amtrak lacks the amount of serviceable, long-distance equipment needed to operate this network. The root cause is Amtrak's overemphasis on *minimizing operating costs* without considering the negative impact this strategy has on its ability to provide useful service *nationwide* to the traveling public.

When Covid began, Amtrak decided to store nearly 100 long-distance passenger cars in "inactive" status. It laid off many operating and maintenance employees with long experience even though Congress appropriated funds to keep them working. All stored cars now require some degree of maintenance to return to active service. We see no indication, however, that Amtrak has directed any funding to such a program, nor has it launched a serious effort to replace most of the long-distance fleet – now approaching 50 years of intensive service – on an expedited basis. The need is more urgent now that the recent derailment of the Southwest Chief removed eight more cars from the "active" roster. The Empire Builder train has been reduced by one coach and one sleeping car for most of this year as we understand it, from its past years make-up, greatly reducing already tight inventory.

The lack of a sufficient quantity of operable equipment is having seriously adverse consequences for passengers. Amtrak cannot add seats to meet the surge in demand caused by elevated gasoline prices and disarray in air travel. It frequently dispatches trains hours after their scheduled initial departure, or that lack the required consist, or that have poorly maintained equipment, which fails enroute. It has adopted the airlines' unfortunate practice of cancelling confirmed reservations at the last minute. On-time performance is non-existent. Passengers are currently experiencing trains that are hours late. They miss connections between trains. While Amtrak management blames host railroads for three quarters of these delays, it conveniently ignores the possibility that many delays attributed to the railroads may result

from Amtrak's own delays cascading downline through the rail system. The Empire Builder's on time arrival at major cities is around 54% this year, unacceptable.

When serious service failures occur, as they seem to with increasing frequency of late, on-board crews lack the resources to mount effective service recovery measures. Coach passengers have only snack service with no access to full meals. Food service cars carry only limited inventory and minimal staffing so when train delays accumulate, service lurches into crisis mode as inventory is exhausted and crew fatigue develops. Many current passengers may never return. To prevent further reductions to the nation's already reduced national system, we strongly urge Congress to hold Amtrak management and the Amtrak board accountable to prioritize and designate already appropriated IJA capital funding to:

- Return all currently inactive, long-distance passenger cars to service.
- Accelerate major locomotive and rolling stock overhauls necessary to extend the service life of its aging and rapidly failing long-distance equipment.
- Expedite a procurement program to replace most of the existing long-distance fleet.
- Elevate on-board services so that crews are better able to deal with passengers when delays occur.

The meltdown of Amtrak's service requires urgent action to prevent the collapse of a federal program in which the President has taken a personal interest but on which he is understandably not currently focused due to other pressing domestic and world-wide events. In the midst of all of these issues, the New York Times reported last week that Amtrak "Awarded Executives with six figure bonuses as the rail service struggled." Many managers received more than \$200,000 in bonuses while the service issues outlined here were experienced by thousands of rail travelers. We feel these bonuses are an extremely inappropriate use of funds.

We have just recently learned through reliable sources that Amtrak is considering reducing the schedules of the long distance trains this fall to either five (5) days or three (3) days a week. Again, at a time when gas prices are high and air service flight cancellations are the norm and Amtrak has received historic levels of funding from Congress. This potential schedule reduction would include the Empire Builder.

We urge you to meet with us early next month to discuss these important national issues.

More information can be found on our site: www.allaboardmn.org. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Best Regards,

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