

**Welcome Remarks Presented By
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Timing is everything!

Passenger rail is enjoying its strongest support in decades. Riders are demanding more and better trains and Congress has responded by increasing appropriations for both Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019. Then last month the Senate underscored just how serious they are about passenger rail...they adopted strong, forceful language demanding that Amtrak run the Southwest Chief in its present form, and keep the National Network...the intercity passenger system...operating intact.

Amtrak recognized the will of the Congress...and testified that it has every intention of keeping its trains running when the positive train control deadline hits us in January.

But, this is not enough. Acknowledging the will of Congress is an important first step. But at its heart it's a defensive one. Amtrak leadership needs to go further...and that's what we're calling on them to do, today.

On behalf of the 40 million Americans who ride our interstate passenger rail network as well as commuter trains, we're calling on leaders at Amtrak to lead—not follow—in helping to create a real surface-transportation policy for the U.S.

We're calling on leaders at Amtrak to look boldly beyond the National Network and riders of today to assess what kind of country we're likely to be in 2040 or 2050...to shape the future of the National Network and to use rail as a way to tie other transportation modes seamlessly and safely together.

We're calling on Amtrak to commit now, today...publicly and resolutely...to modernize Amtrak's rolling stock...to embrace a wholly customer-centric approach to running the railroad...to protect the integrity of the country's interstate train network...and to UPGRADE services like meals and station staffing...rather than downgrade.

What we're calling for today is very simple...and I want all of us to repeat this call everywhere we go...on every visit we make with every mayor...or appointed official...or congressional staffer. We want three things.

We want MORE TRAINS. We want BETTER TRAINS. And we want a COMMITMENT TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT.

What does it mean, when we say we want MORE TRAINS?

This means aggressive growth of frequencies in dense urban corridors...long-awaited expansions such as the Gulf Coast, the Heartland Flyer extension and Front Range Rail...new modern equipment for all lines that will permit more service at lower cost, and modern safety measures—beginning, but not ending, with Positive Train Control. Eliminate, once and for all, the folly of services operating less than daily. Amtrak must start laying the groundwork for a rapid return to a Daily Sunset and a Daily Cardinal service. It is long past time to give up on trains that run three times a week. That's what it means we say we want MORE TRAINS.

What does it mean when we say we want BETTER TRAINS?

Better trains would mean new rolling stock. Better trains would mean moving ahead on refurbishing Superliners while acting quickly to get new equipment on to the Western trains. Better trains would mean no delays in buying new locomotives, coaches, sleepers and diners. Better trains would mean better food...better beverages...worthwhile and modern passenger amenities. And better trains would mean fully and enthusiastically embracing a customer-centric view of passenger service...ensuring that trains' basic services—like toilets and air-conditioning—are reliable and sound while improving the experience for each and every traveler. That's what it means when we say we want BETTER TRAINS.

What does it mean when we say we demand a real COMMITMENT TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT?

We're calling on Amtrak to be able to work with local, state elected and appointed officials to be good community partners for all Americans in all regions, urban or rural. We want to see Amtrak engage creatively and transparently with local communities, state partners and private industry to find ways to say "Yes" to new service and amenities, rather than "No." And...at the same time, all of our Nation's transportation stakeholders need to come together to address the biggest obstacles in our path—resolution to on-time performance (OTP) and shared-use corridor concerns. The Senate supported the Southwest Chief by a vote of 95-4! Now it's time for the Senate to help Amtrak keep its promise to riders and the communities served by the Chief...by voting to give Amtrak the power to fight **for itself** in the courts. This is called private right-of-action. It's also time to engage in an open conversation with host railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Surface Transportation Board about better, less-contentious approaches to shared-use corridors...policy prescriptions that would promote investment in more network fluidity and a better passenger experience. And it's time for all of us to recognize that we face a looming crisis in the Northeast Corridor with the stalled Gateway program. This is the carotid artery of our economy, and right now we see an aneurism forming inside it. We can't ignore it any longer. That's what we mean when we say a real COMMITMENT TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT.

Let's just be clear about what we DON'T mean. It's important that no community served today should see their service degraded. Rural America should not be shortchanged by any shifts in service. Amtrak has a mission beyond the balance sheet, a fact enshrined in law.

Amtrak should always seek prudent stewardship of public funds. But Amtrak is a taxpayer-supported enterprise, whose core mission is to provide mobility and access to communities that need it and where private industry cannot profitably provide it. That doesn't mean the nature of that service can't change, but no community should get worse service in the bargain.

What we want is simple...and it's also going to be profoundly transformative when we get it.

We want MORE TRAINS. We want BETTER TRAINS. And we want COMMITMENT TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT.

We aren't the only ones. So does Congress. So does the riding public.

As the saying goes, LEAD...FOLLOW...OR GET OUT OF THE WAY. Amtrak...you have more money than ever before...more congressional support than ever before...and yes, you have the backing of the advocacy community to do the right thing. You also have a Transportation Department that's open to a real transportation policy. You're having a moment. So now Amtrak...it's up to you. Will you give us MORE TRAINS...BETTER TRAINS...and COMMIT TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT? The timing couldn't be better. Let's do this. Let's do it now.