

TheAuroraGroup, LLC
6000 San Jose Blvd. - #1002
Jacksonville, FL 32217
904-445-0591 or 619-795-6236



Our professionals uplift innovative mobility concepts to build/rebuild a robust, balanced, and efficient North American transportation system

April 23, 2023

Kevin H. Winters
Amtrak Inspector General
10 G St NE
Suite 3W-300
Washington, D.C. 20002

Subject: The Aurora Group urges investigation of Amtrak rolling stock management

Dear Mr. Winters:

The Aurora Group is a coalition of 20-plus business and rail industry professionals who organized in 2022 to examine public transportation issues. A void currently exists that we fill as a citizen watchdog group, much like the GAO or Amtrak OIG. We bring the voice of Americans, shining a light on current challenges facing Amtrak, with data secured through public sources and FOIA requests. A review of this information informs us of the likelihood that Amtrak will soon be unable to provide acceptable service on a national level. This compels us to focus on the “national network” consisting of long-distance routes and short-distance corridors.

Amtrak’s lack of transparency and resultant misinformation and misunderstandings pose great risks to national network sustainment, growth, and expansion. The FRA Long-Distance Service Study, the Corridor ID Program, extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime funding for passenger rail through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and a move towards a “greater” national network outside of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) serve as our clarion call.

We, the undersigned members of The Aurora Group (theauroragroup.org) urge the Amtrak Board of Directors, Amtrak OIG and Senate / House Transportation Committees to perform due diligence by conducting an investigation into Amtrak’s long-distance fleet maintenance and equipment assignment policies.

Our intent is to ensure the nation realizes a shared goal of a robust national passenger rail network with sufficient transparency to meet Congressional will. Please consider these points:

- The national network is an urgent federal priority as it provides mobility choice for 179 million Americans.
- Federally supported long-distance routes are an important part of such a network and represent the only passenger rail access available for 67.3 million people.

- Passenger trains provide mobility, economic/commercial development, jobs, energy and environmental relief, and improve quality of life.
- The glaring lack of options outside of the NEC for reliable, frequent, passenger rail is problematic.

The Aurora Group's top concerns:

- The accelerating deterioration of Amtrak service throughout the nation represents a crisis by all accounts. (Please see the endnotes)
- Amtrak seems unwilling to return stored long-distance cars to service ¹
- Amtrak has stated in various forums and outlets that it currently lacks sufficient equipment to:
 - Accommodate current and growing demand
 - Provide needed amenities
 - Avoid en route mechanical failures
 - Prevent last-minute cancellations that strands passengers with confirmed reservations.

Our request covers both operating and stored-serviceable rolling stock as Amtrak's present inventory represents a paucity of available equipment. During the December 1st Amtrak Board meeting in St Louis, Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner indicated "...stored equipment that is no longer commercially viable are essentially donations to the parts supply."¹ Based upon his answer, an observer might reach the conclusion that most stored equipment is not commercially viable and will not be restored to service. This claim lacks credibility as most, if not all, of this equipment was in service prior to Covid inspired service curtailments ^{2,3,4} and is newer than Amfleet I equipment Amtrak currently uses without issue on Northeast Regional Services.

Unless Amtrak invests currently available funds to bring its entire long-distance fleet back into a state of good repair, the continued operation AND the anticipated restoration and/or expansion of routes is at risk.

In 1979, similar serviceable equipment shortages forced the complete elimination of five national network routes. This can happen again unless Congress holds Amtrak accountable.

We encourage Amtrak to begin an aggressive "heavy-overhaul" program. This is critical to support present and interim demand as the replacement program gets underway. Until new long-distance rolling stock is designed, built, tested, and placed into regular service, equipment shortages will continue and potentially worsen with anticipated equipment attrition. ⁵

Consider that as early as 2010, Amtrak executives knew long-distance equipment was reaching the end of its useful life and outlined a plan to replace most of it by the end of 2022. Yet it was not until January of this year that Amtrak first notified potential suppliers of intent to procure new long-distance equipment. ⁶ This 13-year delay makes it unlikely that new long-distance equipment will be delivered in time to prevent long-term patronage losses.

Amtrak has only two choices at this juncture: Continue ‘business as usual’ on long-distance routes, causing permanent damage to customer and prospective passenger relations, or place stored equipment back in service through a heavy-overhaul program.

“The problem is not funding. Congress provided Amtrak with nearly \$4.8 billion in supplemental funds as pandemic relief. ^{7,8,9} Nor is the problem its workforce. If Amtrak repair forces are inadequate, contractors are available who can perform much of the needed work,” said Aurora Group Co-Chair George Chilson, "We are very concerned that Amtrak management prioritizes cost containment over useful, attractive, and affordable services to America’s travelers."

The Aurora Group seeks your assistance and direct involvement. We stand ready to support efforts to restore and expand passenger rail services. Will you assist?

Sincerely,

George Chilson Chairman - TheAuroraGroup Chairman Emeritus Rail Passengers Association Lieutenant USNR (Ret.) San Diego, CA	James Tilley Co-Chairman - TheAuroraGroup President, Florida Coalition of Rail Passengers Jacksonville, FL
Bob Ash, C.P.M. Minocqua, WI Nokomis, FL	Bruce Ashton Rail Advocate San Antonio, TX
Ken Clifford Treasurer - Rail Passengers Association Colonel USAF (Ret.) Medway, OH	Ed D’Amato Past President - All Aboard Ohio
Paul Dyson President Emeritus, RailPAC Burbank, CA	Carl Fowler Past Vice Chair - Rail Passengers Association President (Retired) - Rail Travel Center/Rail Travel Adventures Williston, VT
Mike Garey Past Directori - All Aboard Arizona Our Train Stations Project & website Lt Col. USAF (Ret.) Peoria, AZ	Barry Green BNSF Railway (Retired) Rail Passengers Association (RPA) - Council Representative (MT) & NW Division Team Leader Glendive, MT
Bill Hutchison Former Director - Rail Passengers Association (RPA) Former President - All Aboard Ohio Albany, NY	Doug Kerr Vice-President - RailPAC Healdsburg, CA

<p>Andrew Lodrigus Director - Rail Passengers Association Gretna, LA</p>	<p>Mark Meyer Manager of Locomotive Utilization at BNSF (Retired) Portland, OR</p>
<p>Bob Moen Council Member - Rail Passengers Association Director - All Aboard Minnesota Charles City, IA</p>	<p>Patrick Montague Founding Member of Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee Former National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) Board Member (now RPA) Granada Hills, CA</p>
<p>Chuck Mott Past President - All Aboard Arizona Past Chairman - All Aboard Washington Sun City West, AZ</p>	<p>Brian Nelson President - All Aboard Minnesota</p>
<p>Albert L. Papp, Jr. Director - New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP), Vice Chair Emeritus - Rail Passengers Association (RPA) Chair Emeritus, Lackawanna Coalition Major, USAF, Retired Millington, NJ</p>	<p>Dave Randall Past Vice Chairman - Rail Passengers Association (RPA) Alton, IL</p>
<p>Steve Sayles Friends of Tampa Union Station Past President - Florida Coalition of Rail Passengers Morrison, FL</p>	<p>Josh Stevens Santa Cruz Voice Talk Show Host Santa Cruz, CA</p>
<p>Bob Stewart Chairman Emeritus - Rail Passengers Association Brentwood, TN</p>	<p>Joe Versaggi President - NJ Association of Railroad Passengers Bridgewater, NJ</p>

cc:

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
U.S. House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines & Hazardous Materials
Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation
Eric J. Soskin, USDOT Inspector General
Amit Bose, Administrator, Federal Railroad Administration
Kevin H. Winters, Amtrak Inspector General

[1] “Amtrak Board of Directors Public Meeting – St. Louis, Missouri”, *YouTube Video*, Time: 1:42:39 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI0znXHf1h4&t=6159s>

[2] Uncredited, “Amtrak sets schedules for triweekly long-distance operation,” *Trains*, August 13, 2020, Internet <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/amtrak-sets-schedules-for-triweekly-long-distance-operation/>

[3] Johnston, Bob, “Short consists constrain Capitol Limited while empty Superliners run on Midwest route: Analysis,” *Trains*, January 19, 2023, Internet: <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/short-consists-constrain-capitol-limited-while-empty-superliners-run-on-midwest-route-analysis>

[4] Equipment Appendices: Historic Opportunities | Amtrak's FY 2022-2027 Service and Asset Line Plans, *National Railroad Passenger Corporation, Amtrak*, Pages 2-6 <https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/businessplanning/Amtrak-Equipment-ALP-Appendices-FY22-27.pdf>

[5] Johnston, Bob, “Amtrak mobility, pricing affected by sidelined long-distance equipment: Analysis,” *Trains*, April 7, 2023, Internet <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/amtrak-mobility-pricing-affected-by-sidelined-long-distance-equipment-analysis/>

[6] Magliari, Marc, Amtrak Media Relations, “First formal step to replace overnight trains in four decades” *Amtrak Media Website*, <https://media.amtrak.com/2023/01/amtrak-starts-the-process-for-new-overnight-trains/>

[7] Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Public Law 116–136, *U.S. Congress*, March 27, 2020, *PDF* Pages 318-319 <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ136/PLAW-116publ136.pdf>

[8] American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Section 7101, Grants to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, *U.S. Congress*, *PDF* Pages 92-94 <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ2/PLAW-117publ2.pdf>

[9] Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2022, National Network Grants to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation | Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grants \ etc., *U.S. Congress*, *PDF* Pages 1006-1009 <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ58/PLAW-117publ58.pdf>