



March 17, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger,

As Congress considers a financial aid package to help the airline industry respond to COVID-19, the *Rail Passengers Association* is asking that Congress also provide adequate funding to allow intercity rail operators, commuter railroads, and public transit agencies to offset their steep revenue losses. These operators, too, are suffering from the sharp decline in travel and commuting in the wake of government recommendations on social distancing, and preserving these essential travel networks is vital to millions of Americans who rely on them and have no other options.

Amtrak

Rail Passengers fully supports Amtrak's request for an additional \$978 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 to offset revenue losses from the collapse in intercity travel. This will help Amtrak sustain Northeast Corridor (NEC) and National Network (NN) service, and withstand reduced payments from states for state-supported services.

Amtrak provides essential intercity service to more than 500 communities across the U.S. Many of these are rural towns not served by the airline industry; there are 34.6 million rural people served by Amtrak's NN and the Alaska Railroad. Most of them would lose all access if these trains went away.

Additionally, Amtrak serves as a host railroad for nine commuter operators, managing infrastructure that carries hundreds of thousands of commuters every day. It is imperative for the U.S. economy that Amtrak's capacity to provide this essential service be maintained in the face of a sharp drop in revenue.

And unlike U.S. airlines, which used \$45 billion to buy back shares of their own stock between 2010 and 2019 (equivalent to 96% of their free cash flow), Amtrak directs the vast majority of its federal grant and revenue stream back into services delivered to real people -- replacing its aging fleet of equipment, bringing undercapitalized infrastructure on the NEC into a state of good repair, upgrading stations across the NN, and toward payroll for nearly 16,000 hardworking Amtrak employees who work, shop, and pay taxes all across the U.S.

We strongly urge Congress to ensure that Amtrak has enough funding to restore pre-COVID-19 levels of service on all existing routes once travel restrictions are lifted, and to bring back any employees who have been furloughed as a result of the reduction of service levels.

Private Sector Rail Operators



Congress has repeatedly attempted to increase private sector involvement in the intercity rail market. In recent years we've seen great progress with the launch of *Brightline* service in Southern Florida and the development of the Texas Central high-speed rail corridor between Houston and Dallas. *Rail Passengers* is asking Congress to ensure that this progress is not undone by the fight to restrict the transmission of COVID-19 through travel restrictions.

Brightline, like every other passenger rail system, has a fixed operating cost. As revenues become more challenged the *Brightline* system will incur operating losses not contemplated in its financial plan for 2020. Support for private passenger rail and commuter rail systems must be part of any stimulus plan to ensure workers stay employed, the transportation systems they work on stay operational, and the existing investment programs to expand service stay on track.

Public Transit Agencies

Rail Passengers supports the American Public Transit Association's [request of \\$12.875 billion](#) for public transit to offset the direct costs and revenue losses from COVID-19 in FY2020. This will allow public transit agencies to cover the direct costs of increased cleaning and disinfecting equipment and facilities, farebox revenue losses, decline in funding from dedicated sales tax revenue, and \$250 million in anticipated restart costs.

Railroad Workers

Rail Passengers is asking Congress to provide the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) additional funds for administering an influx of unemployment claims and remove Railroad Unemployment Insurance from the list of programs subject to sequestration—it is currently the only unemployment program in the country that's subject to these indiscriminate cuts.

Thank you for your consideration of these critical issues. The *Rail Passengers Association* and our 28,000 members stand ready to work with you to support the U.S. passenger rail sector in these difficult times.

Jim Mathews, President & CEO
Rail Passengers Association

CC: Rep. David Price
Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart
Rep. Peter DeFazio
Rep. Sam Graves
Rep. Dan Lipinski
Rep. Rick Crawford