



Testimony Re: Amtrak Funding

From Stu Nicholson

Executive Director

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To the Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stu Nicholson and I am Executive Director of All Aboard Ohio: a statewide organization advocating for greatly improved intercity passenger rail and local public transit. All Aboard Ohio was established soon after the creation of Amtrak and we are now celebrating our 50th Anniversary.

Imagine how Ohioans and our neighboring Great Lakes residents felt when news broke that after 50-plus years, Amtrak was finally going on offense: releasing its “Amtrak Connects US” plan to expand intercity passenger rail on both existing and new corridors.

The GOP Mayor of Crestline, Ohio.... Linda Pitt....immediately lit up the phone lines insisting that Amtrak make her community, once a major hub for the old Pennsylvania Railroad, a stop once again for passenger trains along the proposed Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati (3C&D) Corridor. She got her wish. Crestline is listed as a future stop.

Ohio’s big and small metro planning agencies teamed together to nominate over a dozen corridors under the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor ID Program. Half of those, including the 3C&D, are now awaiting word on their applications for FRA planning grants to advance these corridors.

GOP Governor Mike DeWine, long a supporter of Amtrak when he served in both the House and Senate, ordered the Ohio Rail Development Commission to pursue FRA planning grants for the 3C&D and the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit corridor.

The City of Columbus and the Convention Center unveiled plans for a new downtown station. The City of Cleveland is moving toward a major upgrade of their Lake Erie frontage, including a new Amtrak Station. And communities along these routes are taking inventory of land and existing buildings around station stops to determine what kind of real estate and economic development can grow there.

People and leaders in Ohio are now seeing a “light at the end of the tunnel”: a day when traveling by train no longer means boarding one at “zero-dark-thirty” hours and not being able to return home the same day. The prospect of faster, more frequent and convenient passenger trains has gained the support of (among others):

- The Ohio Mayors Alliance (Ohio’s 52 largest cities)
- The Columbus Partnership (CEO’s of Columbus & Central Ohio’s Largest Corporations)
- The Columbus Chamber of Commerce
- The Downtown Cleveland Alliance
- The Toledo / Lucas County Port Authority
- The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers



- SMART Transportation Union
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
- Toledo Metro Area Council of Governments

Now imagine....we finally seeing a vision of a far better and more diverse transportation system for Ohio: one that connects more Ohioans to jobs, education, health care.... or something as basic as a Buckeye football game, a major art exhibit, jazz festival.....or a Taylor Swift concert.

Imagine major employers and new companies to Ohio, like Intel and Amazon, connecting to a larger, more mobile workforce and one that isn't dependent on driving or having access to a car.

Now imagine how all of us reacted when a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee took a meat cleaver to Amtrak's 2024 budget request and made cuts amounting to over 64%. That's 76% **BELOW** what Congress itself authorized under the **Bipartisan Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA)**

This not only hobbles improving service in the Northeast Corridor and upgrades and expansions to Amtrak's national system of long-distance trains. These proposed cuts literally knee-cap important programs that advance service expansions to in-state and multi-state corridors under the Amtrak Connects Us.

Those half-dozen corridors in Ohio might as well remain a dream. These proposed cuts will instead perpetuate obstacles to growing our economy, creating more critical connections for people seeking jobs, education and more, and setting us back further from effectively dealing with the impacts of climate change.

We cannot pave our way out of any of this. Nor can we saddle our people with few or no options to connect with what they need to lift up their lives.

Mobility is the essence of the very freedom we celebrate every July 4th. To the extent any of us are made less mobile, we are **all** less free.

On behalf of All Aboard Ohio, our supporters and allies, and the people of Ohio and all of states who have submitted some excellent passenger rail corridor proposals, we ask that the Senate fully fund Amtrak's budget request and create the level of mobility and freedom every American wants and deserves.

Thank you.



AllAboard Ohio
For a Connected Midwest