

**Testimony of Mr. Christopher Koos
Nominee to the Amtrak Board of Directors
United States Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
Hearing on Nominations, June 21, 2023**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Chris Koos, the Mayor of Normal, Illinois. I am deeply honored to be nominated to serve on Amtrak's Board of Directors. I would bring to the Board my experience as a mayor, small business owner, Vice Chair for Passenger Rail of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and frequent Amtrak customer. Perhaps most importantly, I would also bring my first-hand knowledge of how improved Amtrak service can enhance mobility and economic development.

I have been Normal's mayor for 20 years. Normal, whose population is around 53,000, is the home of Illinois State University. It is adjacent to the City of Bloomington and about half-way between Chicago and St. Louis. Two Amtrak routes serve the multimodal Bloomington-Normal station, known as Uptown Station, in downtown Normal: the *Texas Eagle*, a long-distance route from Chicago to St. Louis and San Antonio, and the *Lincoln Service*, a state-supported route between Chicago and St. Louis.

When I became mayor, less than 75,000 passengers a year used Amtrak's small, unattractive Bloomington-Normal station. In 2010, Normal was awarded one of the first TIGER (now RAISE) grants to build Uptown Station. Its construction, which created hundreds of good-paying jobs, was completed just two years later, on time and within budget, thanks to a successful partnership among all levels of government, local contractors, and unions. Uptown Station received a LEED Silver certification for its environmentally responsible construction and design. In addition to Amtrak, it is served by public transit and regional buses and contains Town offices. Uptown Station is adjacent to the Constitution Trail, a bicycle and pedestrian trail that traverses Normal and Bloomington.

Uptown Station is an incredible success in every respect, now the second busiest Amtrak station in Illinois, behind only Chicago Union Station. Ridership more than tripled since I became

mayor, to nearly 230,000 a year in pre-pandemic 2019. Private spinoff development spurred by Uptown Station, including new housing, totaled \$175 million.

Today, Uptown Station is the anchor of a vibrant, mixed-use downtown that includes a Children's Discovery Museum, two hotels, a conference center, and attractive public spaces. Uptown Station's success is attributable to partnership and engagement among all levels of government, the private sector, and the community, all of whom recognized the benefits that supporting and investing in passenger rail could provide. When faster schedules are implemented on the Chicago-to-St. Louis route later this month as a result of the long-planned increase in maximum speeds to 110 miles per hour, travel time from Bloomington-Normal's Uptown Station to Chicago will be reduced to approximately two hours and St. Louis will be less than three hours away.

As a member of Amtrak's Board, I will work to develop collaborative relationships among all intercity passenger rail stakeholders, like those that led to Uptown Station's success. I hope to see other cities and towns throughout the United States, including places not served by Amtrak today, replicate what Normal has done and enjoy the benefits it has realized. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides, for the first time, multi-year federal funding that should attract state, local, and private sector investments. I hope it will be followed by a sustainable long-term funding source for intercity passenger rail, like those provided for other forms of passenger transportation.

I admire what Amtrak has accomplished – but I also recognize it needs to improve. There are several areas I intend to focus on if confirmed to serve on Amtrak's Board. One is improving long-distance service. Long-distance trains are even more important to travelers from rural communities on the *Texas Eagle*, many of whom use the train because no other public transportation option is available, and they provide a significant portion of Amtrak's service on many short distance corridors, including the Chicago-to-St. Louis corridor on which Normal is located.

Amtrak also plays a major role in the mobility and independence of the disability community. Providing its members with accessible and reliable service should be one of Amtrak's top

priorities. Amtrak needs to go above and beyond the bare minimum for passengers with disabilities by acquiring new equipment that better suits their needs and upgrading station infrastructure.

Enhancing safety is paramount. After years of effort, Normal secured federal and state grants it is matching that will fund a much-needed underpass at Uptown Station that will provide a safer crossing of the tracks for Amtrak passengers, pedestrians and bike trail users. I hope to encourage similar projects in other Amtrak-served communities. Finally, as the longtime owner of two small retail businesses, I recognize how important it is to improve Amtrak's customer service.

Another priority is improving Amtrak's on-time-performance. The freight railroads over which Amtrak operates must be held accountable for meeting agreed-upon timetables.

I look forward to the opportunity to work closely with the Members and staff of this Committee and all Amtrak stakeholders to create a larger, more effective, and even safer passenger rail system. I will be happy to answer whatever questions you have.