

Questions for the Record

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

MAJORITY

*“Nominations of Joel Matthew Szabat to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors,
Anthony Rosario Coscia to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors
Christopher Koos to be a Director of the Amtrak Board of Directors,
Alvin Brown to be a Member of the National Transportation Safety Board”*

10:00 AM, June 21, 2023

SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL)

Topic: Chicago Hub Improvement Project

Amtrak recently applied for Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail funding for the Chicago Hub Improvement Program or “CHIP.” The full scope of this application is more than \$1 billion.

Funding the CHIP would benefit States across the Midwest, including:

- Indiana, where it would improve service between Chicago and Indianapolis.
- Michigan, where it would improve travel time on routes to Detroit, Port Huron and Grand Rapids.
- Missouri, where it would improve service between Kansas City and St. Louis.
- Wisconsin, where it would expand service between Milwaukee and Chicago as well as service to Madison, Eau Claire and establish new service to Green Bay.

1. If confirmed, will you commit to visiting Chicago to see the proposed hub improvements?

Response: I will commit to doing so. In the past year, I have traveled to Chicago twice and discussed CHIP when I met with Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman in Chicago earlier this month. I look forward to meeting you and your staff in Chicago to further discuss CHIP.

SENATOR BEN RAY LUJÁN (D-NM)

Last year, in a hearing with several of the same nominees before us today, I joined several of my Commerce Committee colleagues in pushing for robust funding for Amtrak to improve and expand our nation's long distance rail network.

Over the past year, I have continued to hear horror stories about hours-long delays, cancellations, and mechanical issues caused by outdated and broken equipment.

1. Mr. Coscia, can you confirm that Amtrak is committed to replacing and improving outdated equipment across all of Amtrak's network, including on the Southwest Chief serving New Mexico?

Response: Amtrak is absolutely committed to replacing the outdated equipment in our long-distance fleet, including the Superliner cars that operate on the *Southwest Chief*, most of which are more than 40 years old. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided the funding we have long sought for this investment. Following its enactment, Amtrak began a procurement for new long-distance equipment, and we expect to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to equipment manufacturers later this year.

I was glad to see that Amtrak requested robust funding during the Fiscal Year 2024 funding cycle, and am happy to support strong investments in our country's rail network. However, I was concerned to see that Amtrak's requested increases for the Northeast Corridor far outpaced Amtrak's requested increases for the National Network. Amtrak's budget request document states that increases specifically for the Northeast Corridor are necessary "to improve (rather than simply sustain) service." The National Network is in desperate need of investment, and my constituents deserve to be just as reliably connected to the world as the people who live here on the East Coast.

2. Mr. Coscia, is Amtrak committed to improving service across ALL lines, not exclusively on the Northeast Corridor?

Response: You are correct that Amtrak's National Network is in urgent need of investment. The enactment of IIJA provides at last the funding needed to begin making those investments. In fact, of the \$22 billion in IIJA funding provided directly to Amtrak, the vast majority of it – \$16 billion – is for the National Network. In addition to the long-distance equipment procurement and the CHIP program to improve infrastructure and facilities in Chicago, the hub of our National Network, we are making billions of dollars in investments throughout our National Network. Among many other things, we plan to bring all stations into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and construct and improve mechanical facilities where National Network trains are maintained.

While Amtrak's ownership of Northeast Corridor infrastructure and stations makes us responsible for making the capital investments those assets require (for which costs are shared with other users), we are committed to improving service on all of our routes, and to adding new routes in regions underserved by Amtrak, as I have described above. You can also see this in the funding we have provided to maintain and upgrade infrastructure

along the *Southwest Chief* route (even though we do not own it), and in the seven applications we recently submitted for Federal-State Partnership grants to improve long-distance routes, including upgrading the signal system along the *Southwest Chief* route in New Mexico and Colorado.

Our FY24 grant request identified a number of opportunities to invest in the National Network, not just to operate and maintain the status quo, but also to improve and modernize our services. For example, we requested more than \$200 million for a long-distance improvement program, \$175 million for CHIP, \$50 million to improve stations across the National Network, and \$50 million for customer enhancements on the National Network. Amtrak is committed to these important services, but such modernization will require investment from the federal government.

SENATOR RAPHAEL WARNOCK (D-GA)

Topic: Amtrak Expansion and Safety in the Southeast

I am concerned by reports of delays and stoppages on Amtrak routes, and the general lack of expansion of passenger rail service beyond the Northeast Corridor. For example, last year, passengers on the Crescent train, which has three stops in Georgia, were stuck on the train for hours due to winter storms without food, functioning toilets, and information about what was to come.¹ This March, an Amtrak train from New Orleans to Atlanta was delayed after the train struck a car at a train crossing.² The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which I was proud to support, includes nearly \$13 billion for Amtrak grants for activities associated with the National Network and over \$1.3 billion in funding for the Federal Railroad Administration to carry out railroad safety activities. This support is a good starting point, but there is clearly more work to be done to expand rail access in Georgia and the greater southeast.

1. What actions can or should Congress take to support the expansion of Amtrak service in the Southeast, particularly in Georgia?

Response: Congress already took the vital first step: enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). For the first time in Amtrak's half century history, the bill provides significant, multi-year funding to Amtrak and competitive grant programs administered by the Federal Railroad Administration to improve and expand service throughout our National Network. The most important actions Congress should take to enable Amtrak to achieve the IIJA's objectives and continue to improve and expand service beyond the IIJA's five-year time frame are providing Amtrak with adequate annual appropriations for its National Network and establishing a funding mechanism to provide dedicated and predictable funding for intercity passenger rail, such as the trust funds Congress provides for other transportation modes.

2. What steps can Congress take to ensure that Amtrak trains operating on the National Network are safe and on time for passengers?

Response: With regard to safety, maintaining Amtrak's eligibility for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grants, a vital source of funding for safety improvements not eligible for other IIJA-funded programs, and providing adequate annual appropriations that allow Amtrak to fund all planned safety projects are of the greatest importance. As for improving on-time performance, Amtrak needs an effective, expeditious remedy, such as meaningful enforcement, when host freight railroads violate the law by failing to give Amtrak trains preference over freight trains. (During May, the New York-Atlanta-New Orleans *Crescent* route that serves Georgia had the highest level of freight train interference delays on host railroads of any Amtrak route.) For our part,

¹ <https://www.ajc.com/neighborhoods/north-fulton/atlanta-amtrak-passengers-trapped-30-plus-hours-on-train/77QSQTWQDNEW5F7WEC6KCIDR6M/>

² <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/amtrak-train-strikes-suv-douglas-county>

Amtrak has made significant improvements to its management of train operations to ensure that everything possible is being done to limit delays and that the resources necessary are available for deployment to respond when delays occur.