

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: Absolutely, yes. I grew up around Boston, colloquially known as ‘the Hub.’ But, Chicago has been the actual hub of American railroading for over 150 years. More railroads serve Chicago than anywhere else in the country. If confirmed, I hope to help direct Amtrak towards increasing the reliability and quantity of its services on the National Network. As history, geography, and the background to your question all indicate, Amtrak can only succeed nationally if it succeeds on the routes emanating from Chicago.

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: As recent negotiations with host railroads in the southeast have shown, agreement on how much to spend on capital improvements is perhaps the hardest nut to crack in order to reach agreement on expanded and improved passenger service. To that end, the actions that Congress has already taken in the BIL to provide more capital funding were enormously helpful.

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

Response: From my prior experience overseeing the United States Department of Transportation's Recovery Act programs, I learned the value of multimodal discretionary grant programs that enabled the Department to tackle the most urgent grade-crossing and other rail safety and service issues nationwide. I commend that continued approach to Congress. Safety was my top priority in the Department and would continue to be at Amtrak. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about Amtrak's evolving safety management system; to ensuring that Amtrak is focused on improving the performance of its host railroads and to taking actions to reduce delays that are within its control; and to working with your office if and as I find additional areas where Congressional action is necessary for Amtrak to improve safety or increase passenger service and reliability in the southeast.

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>