

**Testimony of Mr. Christopher Koos  
Nominee to the Amtrak Board of Directors  
United States Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee  
Hearing on Nominations, September 7, 2022**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, 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, to which I bring my experience as a mayor, small business owner, Vice Chair for Passenger Rail of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and frequent Amtrak customer.

Normal, the home of Illinois State University, is adjacent to the City of Bloomington and roughly midway between Chicago and St. Louis. Amtrak's multimodal Bloomington-Normal station, known as Uptown Station, is in downtown Normal, and is served by two Amtrak routes: 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.

As Mayor of Normal for 19 years, I have seen firsthand the positive impact of expanding and improving Amtrak service. When I became mayor, Amtrak's Bloomington-Normal station had less than 75,000 passengers a year. In 2010, Normal was awarded one of the first TIGER grants to replace its small, unattractive Amtrak station with Uptown Station. Uptown Station 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. Its construction created hundreds of good-paying jobs, and the project received a LEED Silver certification for its environmentally responsible construction and design.

In addition to Amtrak, Uptown Station includes space for public transit, regional buses, and Town offices. It is adjacent to the Constitution Trail, a bicycle and pedestrian trail that traverses Normal and Bloomington.

Uptown Station is an incredible success. It is the busiest Amtrak station in Illinois after 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 – all easily accessible to residents of Chicago, St. Louis, and many other places served by Amtrak. The key to its success is partnership and engagement by all levels of government, the private sector, and the community, who all recognized the benefits that supporting and investing in passenger rail could provide.

As a member of Amtrak's Board, I will work to develop positive, unified relationships among all intercity passenger rail stakeholders, like those that led to Uptown Station's success. There are hundreds of cities and towns throughout the United States, including many not served by Amtrak today, that could and should experience the mobility and community development benefits of passenger rail investment that Normal's residents enjoy. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides, for the first time, multi-year federal funding that should attract state, local, and private sector investment. I hope it will set the stage for establishing an identified, sustainable long-term funding source for intercity passenger rail, like those for other forms of passenger transportation.

As much as I admire Amtrak, I recognize its need for improvement. There are several things I will focus on as a member of the Board, if confirmed. One of them is long-distance service. I know how important Amtrak's long-distance trains are to residents of Normal who lack sufficient airport access, as well as other travelers from rural communities I've met on the *Texas Eagle*, many of whom use the train for short distance trips because no other public transportation option is available. Often overlooked is the fact that long-distance trains also provide a significant portion of Amtrak's service on many short distance corridors.

Amtrak also plays a major role in the mobility and independence of the disability community, all of whom should experience accessible and reliable service whenever they travel by Amtrak. Amtrak needs to go above and beyond the bare minimum for passengers with disabilities by purchasing rolling stock that better suits their needs and upgrading station infrastructure.

Amtrak's on-time-performance must be significantly improved, and freight rail companies must be held accountable for meeting agreed-upon timetables. I am also intent on making Amtrak a safer system: grade-separation and railroad right-of-way improvements that created safer conditions in Normal should be replicated in other communities Amtrak serves. And as the 42-year long owner of two small retail businesses I'm very focused on improving customer service.

I hope to have 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'm happy to answer any questions you may have.