

To House T&I Chairman James Oberstar

June 18, 2007

The Honorable James Oberstar, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Oberstar:

The National Association of Railroad Passengers strongly opposes the Boozman "Amtrak amendment" to H.R. 2701, the Transportation Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation Act of 2007.

We are concerned that enactment of this amendment would be destructive to Amtrak, leading to elimination of many routes. Route eliminations are the last thing we need just when more and more Americans are coming to realize the many reasons Amtrak is important.

- Oak Ridge National Laboratory statistics for 2005 show that automobiles and commercial airlines, respectively, consumed 27.2% and 20.5% more energy per passenger-mile than Amtrak—increasingly important as the nation seeks to reduce its oil dependence;
- Amtrak therefore is relevant to addressing the very issues of climate change which are central to H.R. 2701;
- Travelers increasingly seek the rail alternative to congested highways and airports;
- The ranks of America's senior citizens are constantly growing, and with them the number of people who do not want to or should not drive; and
- The number of rural communities without intercity bus service has grown, along with the number that Amtrak serves and buses do not.

The Boozman amendment strikes at the heart of the deal between America's citizens and its private railroads that led to Amtrak's start-up in 1971: the railroads would be relieved of their intercity passenger losses, and Amtrak would get the right of access to the tracks of the railroads on an incremental cost basis, that is, with Amtrak paying for those costs that would disappear in Amtrak's absence. The Surface Transportation Board inherited the Interstate Commerce Commission's authority to adjudicate railroad/Amtrak, access-related disputes. Today, most Amtrak/railroad contracts include "incentive" provisions under which Amtrak pays amounts above the incremental cost if the railroad achieves a certain on-time performance level.

The Boozman amendment serves no public purpose. As noted above, the Amtrak system is substantially more energy efficient than automobiles and commercial airlines.

Furthermore, Amtrak works as a network, with a high share of passengers, particularly on overnight trains, connecting from one train to one or more other trains. By giving the Department of Transportation new opportunities to eliminate Amtrak routes administratively, and particularly in light of the DOT's long record of non-support for Amtrak and its national network, the amendment threatens to reduce ridership even on trains that win DOT approval for continuation, due to loss of connecting passengers. More importantly, elimination of routes from Amtrak's slim, existing network threatens to pull apart the tacit contract among parts of the nation with different services, and thus to end federal funding for intercity passenger rail.

Beyond that, passenger trains are the windows through which many Americans see the railroad industry. Thus, Amtrak's presence has been the primary or sole reason for many public investments that benefit the freight railroads—both the addition of track capacity and the improvement or elimination of grade crossings.

Thank you for all of your efforts to give Americans the travel choices they need, including your work to defeat the Boozman amendment.

Sincerely,

Ross B. Capon
Executive Director