



Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission

MEMORANDUM

July 7, 2019

To: Jill Gaebler, Chair
Jacob Riger, Vice Chair
Randy Grauberger, Project Director

From: James M. Souby, Commissioner

Subject: Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Hearing

As I reported to the Commission on June 13, 2019, I was invited to testify to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee concerning Colorado's experience with Amtrak and, in particular, the Southwest Chief Passenger Train. I believe I was asked to testify at the June 26th hearing because I have had continuous interaction with Members of the Committee since 2012 on the subject. The title of the hearing was: *Amtrak: Next Steps for Passenger Rail*. My testimony was well received based on feedback I have received.

Prior to the Hearing I consulted with members of the Commission, staff of CDOT and staff of the Rail Passengers Association, a national advocacy organization in Washington, DC. I also consulted with the majority and minority staff of the Committee as well as staff in the offices of Senators Cory Gardner (R, CO) and Tom Udall (D, NM) who sit on the Committee. In those discussions it was decided the best testimony would be based on my long-term relationship with the issue and lessons that would bear on reauthorization of the surface transportation act, *Fixing America's Surface Transportation* (FAST Act), which expires in 2020. With respect to both issues, I had briefed staff of Senators Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet (D, CO) as recently as April.

The principle purpose of my testimony was to support Congress's intervention on behalf of sustaining the operation of the Southwest Chief and other long distance trains in the West. My second purpose was to provide recommendations that would improve the sustainability and operations of passenger rail service if incorporated in the reauthorization. To that end I recommended that the Committee adopt the language from the recent Amtrak appropriations act into the forthcoming reauthorization which would have a duration of five years if enacted.

With respect to recent events I reminded the senate staff that problems seem to have arisen from insufficient or opaque communications from senior Amtrak management, not due to Amtrak's

representatives serving on the Commission. This was reflected in Senator Udall's questions to me wherein he mentioned that problems have arisen in spite of dedicated Amtrak personnel.

When the issue of Positive Train Control (PTC) came up, I mentioned the extraordinary high costs of equipping the sole use New Mexico track segment for just two trains a day. I was not opposing PTC, but under the impression that less costly safety measures might be found. Mr. Anderson immediately chided me for opposing providing rural residents with the same safety provisions as urban residents. This was bizarre as I was relying on Amtrak's own reports to the Commission that they would be conducting a risk assessment and mitigation study to determine if such a solution exists. I am attempting to amend my testimony to ensure this matter is reported correctly if the Senate will allow it. Mr. Anderson, himself, testified earlier in the hearing that Amtrak was considering these kinds of equivalent safety measures.

I have attached the latest version of my testimony; I am still consulting with Senate staff on possible amendments and corrections. Thanks.

Enclosure