

Questions for the Record to the Honorable Chris Koos
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
Full Committee Nominations Hearing
August 6, 2020

Written Questions Submitted by the Hon. Maria Cantwell to the Hon. Chris Koos.

Question 1. What specific steps will you take at Amtrak to prevent another crash like the one that occurred in DuPont, Washington?

Answer.

I look forward to discussing the details of this tragic crash with you if confirmed. I suspect the 2017 Amtrak train derailment near DuPont may have been prevented had the operator received more training and if positive train control technology had been in place at the time. It is my understanding that as of August 2020, Amtrak has fully implemented PTC on all of its owned or controlled tracks and locomotives 4.5 months ahead of schedule. This is an important milestone in improving safety across the rail network. If confirmed, I would advocate for the implementation of the newest safety technologies and thorough operational training.

Question 2. What actions or assistance from Congress or other entities is necessary to prevent another crash like the one that occurred in DuPont, Washington from occurring in the future?

Answer.

If confirmed, I would ask Congress to fully fund safety programs at Amtrak, the US Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration.

Question 3. What do you view as the most important elements of a robust and committed safety culture?

Answer.

I truly believe a robust and committed safety culture requires that Amtrak employees at every level and passengers feel informed, unified in purpose, and invested in maintaining a safe environment from the board and president to the engineers and conductors including station staff and passengers. Every rider and employee should be in charge of overseeing and developing safety within Amtrak. I am committed to training and education as they are key to a successful safety culture.

Question 4. What specific steps will you take to ensure that those important elements are present within the Amtrak organization, and that safety culture remains a top priority for Amtrak during your tenure?

Answer.

We must uphold safety culture at all levels. If confirmed, I believe that the Board of Directors must be at the forefront of promoting safety culture. If I become a member of the Board, I am invested in studying improvements to Amtrak's Safety Management Systems to ensure that safety culture remains the top priority for Amtrak during my tenure.

Written Questions Submitted by the Hon. Gary Peters to the Hon. Chris Koos.

Question 1. The top priority for Amtrak must be safety. Can you talk about your vision for Amtrak to emerge from the pandemic from a safety perspective as well as the importance of positive train control implementation?

Answer.

I agree, safety must be Amtrak's number one priority. As of August 2020, Amtrak has completed full positive train control (PTC) implementation 4.5 months ahead of schedule, with the final installation on a mile of slow-speed track in the Chicago terminal. Amtrak must continue to work with its host rail partners to ensure full PTC implementation on all U.S. rail infrastructure.

Amtrak also has a duty to improve safety on its rail crossings. According to the Federal Rail Administration (FRA), trespassing on railroad property is the leading cause of all rail-related deaths in the United States. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the FRA and Operation, local governments, first responders, and host railroads on improving safety.

As we continue to combat the coronavirus pandemic, Amtrak must continue to follow Center for Disease Control guidelines by implementing enhanced safety and cleaning measures.

Question 2. One of the major challenges to Amtrak is on-time performance ("OTP"). The FRA issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in March that included updates to OTP schedules. Do you have thoughts on the NPRM or solutions for OTP schedules?

Answer.

According to Amtrak's Office of Inspector General, poor OTP wastes taxpayer dollars. A five percent improvement on all Amtrak routes would result in millions in cost savings. I look forward to learning more about the NPRM and support OTP standards that provide reliability for passengers and operational efficiencies for Amtrak.

Question 3. Michigan has one of the highest percentages of state-supported rail lines in the country. Can you share your thoughts on the prospects of improving and expanding service in states like Michigan that have significant state supported rail lines?

Answer.

State-supported lines provide multiple daily connections for hundreds of smaller communities to major metropolitan areas. The Town of Normal has significantly benefited from the state-supported Lincoln Service, which provides daily service between Chicago and St. Louis, MO. State-supported corridors are useful economic drivers for both small communities and large cities. If confirmed, I will continue to support improving and possibly expanding service on state-supported routes.