

United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Testimony of Sarah E. Feinberg
August 6, 2020
Nomination Hearing – Amtrak Board of Directors

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell, and to the other distinguished members of the Commerce Committee, I want to thank you for holding this morning's hearing, during what is an unprecedented time for this country and this body. I know your time is incredibly valuable and you have many demands on your attention, and I thank you for your service and for your interest today.

I appear in front of you as a nominee to the Amtrak Board of Directors. This is a board I served on previously, in 2015 and 2016, while also serving as the Federal Railroad Administrator at the US Department of Transportation. As Federal Railroad Administrator, I served as the country's safety regulator of both passenger and freight rail.

During that stint on the Amtrak Board, I had the opportunity to help shape the company's approach to safety, its continued implementation of Positive Train Control, and its approach to making its system more accessible to all. I also worked closely with the company and with my fellow board members as we implemented service improvements across the country, including on state supported routes and on the company's long distance service, including the contemplation of the return of Gulf Coast service.

At each turn, I felt our board was able to simultaneously work with the company, and work closely with the Congress, including this committee and its staff, to further safety, improve service for riders, improve business performance, and protect taxpayer dollars. To that end, I view the possibility of a second stint on the Amtrak board as an opportunity to continue to push forward with safety improvements for all passengers, and to serve both the traveling public, and taxpayers.

Without a doubt, Amtrak faces an unprecedented moment and a challenging future. Like all transportation entities, its finances have been severely impacted by the COVID pandemic. Ridership has decreased dramatically, and the timing of its return is uncertain, while cleaning costs have risen. I believe Amtrak is taking the right steps to address this crisis head on – leaning into cleaning and disinfection, requiring masks and social distancing, and matching service levels to current ridership demands.

I believe members of the Amtrak Board have a serious fiduciary responsibility to the company, as well as to taxpayers. Members of the board must also feel a responsibility and share a commitment to improving safety, service and reliability for our passengers. I can assure you I take those responsibilities seriously. In the immediate term, if my nomination is successful, I would look forward to working closely with Amtrak to ensure continued protection of passengers during the pandemic, and to return stability to the company, its workforce, and its finances.

My current day job is serving as the Interim President of New York City Transit, the largest public transit agency in North America. And it is my day job that prevents me from being with you in person today – as I remain in New York City, leading our agency as we continue our clean up and restoration efforts following Tropical Storm Isaias, and of course our ongoing work to recover from our first wave of COVID and prevent our second and subsequent waves.

It is an honor to be with you today, even virtually, and I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you.