

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Hon. Maria Cantwell to Hon. Todd Rokita

Amtrak Safety Culture and Safety Management System (SMS). One month before a fatal Amtrak derailment in DuPont, Washington in December 2017, the Chairman of the NTSB, Robert Sumwalt, provided an ominous warning about Amtrak's safety culture. He said quote, "Amtrak's safety culture is failing, and is primed to fail again, until and unless Amtrak changes the way it practices safety management." Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson has testified before this committee that improving the safety culture at Amtrak is one of his top priorities.

Question 1. As a member of the Amtrak board, will you fully support efforts to improve Amtrak's safety culture, including ongoing efforts to implement a safety management system, or SMS?

Answer. *Yes. As my testimony at Committee indicated, I completely agree that safety is and should remain Amtrak's highest priority. I understand that Mr. Anderson has made significant strides in improving Amtrak's safety culture and putting in place an industry standard Safety Management System (SMS) overseen by Amtrak's Chief Safety Officer, elevating this element of the company to the executive level. I applaud Mr. Anderson's efforts and will continue to push for a strong safety culture and continuous improvement in these systems. Safety is an ongoing effort and, if confirmed, I will work with my Board colleagues to support these critical actions.*

Amtrak's Long-Distance Routes. Amtrak's long-distance routes are important to Washington's rural communities. There are two long-distance lines in my state, the Coast Starlight and the Empire Builder. These lines serve 15 communities in my state, the majority being smaller rural communities. Yet the administration has repeatedly advocated for eliminating these long-distance routes. And last year, Amtrak proposed replaced a portion of the Southwest Chief service with bus service through Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico.

Question 2. Why is it important to maintain Amtrak's network of long-distance passenger service as a whole?

Answer. *Long-distance service provides a critical link to many communities across the United States. The existence of this service has connected communities for decades. However, I understand from past testimony that the Nation's demographics are shifting and that it's important for Congress and Amtrak to look into how to improve the current system that hasn't changed at any significant level since the 1970s. Amtrak customers, and your constituents, do and should expect reliable, on-time transportation options. If confirmed, I hope to provide that scrutiny on the Board.*

Question 3. Will you assure this committee that you will support continuing Amtrak's long-distance routes?

Answer. *Yes. I will continue to support Amtrak's long-distance routes and look forward to how Congress handles this issue in the next surface transportation authorization.*

Amtrak Funding. When serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, you voted to end federal funding to Amtrak.

Question 4. Without federal funding, Amtrak would have difficulty operating outside the Northeast Corridor. Should Amtrak only serve areas where it makes a profit from ticket revenue?

Answer. *I believe in fiscal responsibility and I also believe that my votes against these funding provisions sent a message to Amtrak that they should be spending the taxpayer's money wisely. If confirmed, I intend to bring that sense of responsibility to the American taxpayer to this position and exercise the fiduciary responsibility of a member of the Board. I did vote ultimately to support full passage of the FAST Act of 2015, which included Amtrak reauthorization. In law, Amtrak is required by Congress to attempt to run a profitable company to the best of its ability. I recognize that this sometimes means making difficult choices across the system, but it is important, given Amtrak's unique structure that these decisions be done with the consultation and advice of Congress. Ultimately, Congress is tasked under our federal Constitution with the responsibility for how taxpayers' resources are spent.*

Question 5. Do you view continuing passenger rail service in rural areas as necessary?

Answer. *Rural areas frequently benefit from passenger rail service. But this service should be reliable, on-time and at a realistic time that works well for the community and providing what the customers in these community expect for service. Many times, these trains are late due to freight train interference, show up in the middle of the night and provide amenities that are outdated. Our rural communities should expect better and I hope to work with Amtrak to improve these circumstances and ensure rural communities remain connected to the larger transportation network.*

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Hon. Amy Klobuchar to Hon. Todd Rokita

Question. The Empire Builder, one of Amtrak's longest rail lines, provides a vital link for many rural towns in Minnesota and helps generate about \$327 million in economic impact annually for cities along its route. The President's budget calls for reducing federal funding for Amtrak's long-distance services. Will you commit to protecting funding for Amtrak's long distance services like the Empire Builder if you are confirmed to this position?

Answer. *Long-distance is an important part of Amtrak's network. Mr. Anderson noted that the Empire Builder is a viable part of that network in his recent testimony, but as I stated earlier, many times, these trains are late due to freight train interference, show up in the middle of the night and provide amenities that are outdated. Our rural communities should expect better and I hope to work with Amtrak to improve these circumstances.*

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Hon. Tom Udall to Todd Rokita

Question. There are significant concerns that the current CEO of Amtrak will undermine the long-distance national network. As you may be aware, last year Amtrak proposed replacing a significant portion of the Southwest Chief route with buses. How will you independently analyze Amtrak's proposals for the network?

Answer. As noted previously, I believe long-distance service provides a critical link to communities across the United States. If confirmed, I am committed to analyzing all of Amtrak's proposals across the network to fully understand and build a more fiscally responsible, reliable, and safer national passenger rail network. I believe there is an important role for Amtrak, especially in connecting our rural communities, and I hope to learn more, if confirmed, during my service on the Board about the value these trains can bring across the entire network.

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Hon. Jon Tester to Hon. Todd Rokita

Federal Subsidies for National Rail Service. There's a constant drumbeat that long-distance rail lines are unprofitable money pits and we should protect taxpayers' money by eliminating federal funding of these lines.

What I don't understand is the double standard. Other travel infrastructure – highways, airports – is heavily subsidized by the federal government and not profit-generating centers.

Question 1. Why do you think long-distance rail travel is singled out?

Answer. *It's a good point. Every mode of transportation receives some form of government assistance. I think it is important to consider the return on investment; basically, how many rides are produced by taxpayer's dollars, and I think intercity passenger rail can play an important role in the transportation network and in many cases a strong ROI. If we are going to compare ROI across modes, it is also fair to consider the utilitarian aspect of each mode—that is how many Americans are using each mode.*

Question 2. You voted on multiple occasions while in Congress to cut Amtrak funding. Do you still stand by your votes to defund Amtrak and why?

Answer. *I believe in fiscal responsibility and I also believe that my votes against these funding provisions sent a message to Amtrak that they should be spending the taxpayer's money wisely. If confirmed, I intend to bring that sense of responsibility to the American taxpayer to this position and exercise the fiduciary responsibility of a member of the Board. I did vote ultimately to support full passage of the FAST Act of 2015, which included Amtrak reauthorization.*

Question 3. What needs to be done to make long-distance rail service profitable?

Answer. *There is no evidence that any intercity passenger rail company worldwide can provide a profitable long-distance (over 750 miles) service. This possibility is even less in the United States given the vast expanses Amtrak must travel to provide the service, and on leased track. However, it is important to note that there is evidence that corridors shorter than 400 miles that link major population centers can thrive as evidenced by the Northeast Corridor and some of the state-supported routes Amtrak currently operates today and wants to expand in the future.*

Great Financial Bottom Line, Little Guy Loses. In the President's FY2020 budget request, it states that "restructuring the Amtrak system can result in better service". You know what often happens when companies restructure? The financial bottom line looks great, but the little guy loses.

Question 4. As a member of Amtrak's Board, what will you do to protect the little guy – to protect access to rail service for people and communities in Montana and rural America?

Answer. *Long-distance is an important part of Amtrak's network. Mr. Anderson noted that the Empire Builder is a viable part of that network in his recent testimony, but as I stated earlier, many times, these trains are late, show up in the middle of the night and provide amenities that are outdated. Our rural communities should expect better and I hope to work with Amtrak to improve these circumstances.*

Establishing a standing committee for long-distance lines. During the past couple of years, Amtrak made operational decisions with little or no opportunity for impacted rural stakeholders to offer information and perspectives about the changes. Amtrak already has separate standing Amtrak-stakeholder committees for the Northeast Corridor and State-Supported routes.

Question. Would you commit to supporting the establishment of an Amtrak-stakeholder committee to address national long-distance rail service issues?

Answer. *Since I have not served on the Board, I do not know the ins and outs of Amtrak and how it interacts with the various Committees that Congress has established. However, it is my understanding that the stakeholder committees you reference for the NEC and state-supported routes were established to facilitate cost-sharing agreements as required by Congress. If confirmed, I promise to look into this idea for long-distance routes.*

Restore Ticket Agents at Havre & Shelby. Last year, Amtrak shut a number of ticket offices across the country – citing that other options were available including on-line internet and automated telephone ticket purchases. Two of those closed ticket offices were at Havre and Shelby stations in Montana. At the time, Amtrak informed me that the decision was made to cut costs “without significantly impacting service to your constituents.” Well, that’s just not the case. If Amtrak had reached out to these communities prior to implementing its decision, perhaps it would have discovered that nearly 25% of Montanans do not have access to a SINGLE broadband provider. How does one buy a ticket online if one doesn’t have access to any—never mind reliable—Internet. By the way, there is no Wi-Fi available at ANY Amtrak station in Montana.

In a different case, two grandparents found out the hard way when they arrived at the station to put their grandson on the train home that unaccompanied minors can only board at stations where a ticket agent is present. So, they had to buy tickets for themselves on the spot – at the last minute and, I suspect, at premium rates.

Amtrak’s service support in rural America needs to be greater, not less. Alternative support solutions readily available in larger, more urban areas are in fact fewer or non-existent in rural America.

Question 6. Given the types of unforeseen events passengers and community members encounter at Havre and Shelby stations, will you commit to supporting re-staffing these stations with ticket agents?

Answer. *Thank you for this insight. I am aware of these examples from a very helpful conversation I had with your office. Given the complexity of this issue, I hope to spend time looking into this, if confirmed. I have heard from several offices on the various impacts to the system when station agents are shifted and realize its importance to each community. I would look forward to being a partner in working towards viable solutions for these issues.*