



William J. Flynn
President and Chief Executive Officer

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Thank you for your letter of June 3 regarding the impact of COVID-19 on Amtrak, its employees, and the services that we offer. The pandemic has driven unprecedented changes across society, and Amtrak is no exception – our response has required us to take dramatic actions, develop new procedures, and make plans for a very uncertain future. Throughout, we have been grateful to our frontline employees across the country for their dedication to delivering safe, dependable service for the customers who have remained. We are very conscious of the essential nature of the service we have been delivering, and our overriding goal has been to ensure the safety of our passengers and employees while adapting our services and amenities to match current demands. I was happy to have had the opportunity to discuss these matters with you personally, in May, and I will address your questions in the order in which you raised them in your letter.

The simplest way to express the significance of the impact of the pandemic on Amtrak is to compare this year’s ridership to last year’s:

	2019	2020	Change
January	2,246,026	2,398,335	6.8%
February	2,133,916	2,275,432	6.6%
March	2,661,689	1,128,332	-57.6%
April	2,663,529	121,140	-95.5%
May	2,801,562	213,907	-92.4%

Another useful way to express the severity of the changes wrought by the pandemic is to review the service changes made across Amtrak’s route network. From a systemwide perspective, March and April brought a roughly 95 percent year-over-year reduction in ridership and future bookings, and while there



has been some modest increase in demand, it remains significantly depressed. The loss of revenue will result in a roughly \$700 million adjusted operating loss this year. Overall, at the height of our suspensions, more than half of daily frequencies had been halted. In the Northeast, the flagship *Acela* service was suspended through the end of May and *Northeast Regional* service was reduced by more than 70 percent, with fewer cars operating on fewer trains. For our State Supported trains, where the sponsoring states set service levels, several services were fully suspended and most services were reduced at states' request. Amtrak also determined the service levels for the Long Distance trains, and for the most part they continued largely as usual, albeit with shorter consists. At times, certain routes have been temporarily shortened as a result of crewmembers' exposure to COVID-19; and the possibility remains of similar disruptions in the future.

Another illustrative way to show the impact is to review the policies and procedures we adopted or revised as a result of the pandemic. These changes included the following:

- Requirements for face coverings for employees and passengers.
- Remote work, when possible.
- Intensified cleaning protocols on board and at stations, shops, and offices.
- Performing employee contact tracing that is fully consistent with CDC and public health guidelines and in line with benchmarked transportation providers, including various transit agencies.
- Use of employee temperature checks at critical Operations locations.
- COVID-19 diagnostic testing is covered by our medical plan and is available to any employee who has a reason to be tested.
- Expanded use of fleet vehicles to provide for social distancing when traveling for work.
- Limiting passenger capacity on our trains to achieve proper social distancing.
- Modifying boarding procedures to reduce queuing.
- Waiving cancellation and change fees for corona-related reservations.
- Trains and stations have been stocked with additional flu kits.
- Switch to cashless-only payments on trains and in stations, reducing passengers' and employees' risk of exposure.
- Changes to overnight and layover crew meals accommodations.
- Cessation of full-service dining on western Long Distance trains and other similar changes to onboard food and beverage service to maintain a safer environment for passengers and employees.
- Amtrak has required that all employees who have symptoms, or who may have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, stay home from work, and we have provided pay protection to encourage them to do so. This keeps sick employees, presumed COVID-19-positive employees, and potential COVID-19-positive employees safely away from coworkers and the public. We also have not applied the National System Attendance Policy against any illness-related absences during this time.



In terms of our expectations for continued impacts, Amtrak now projects that a full year 50 percent reduction in system-wide revenue is a prudent estimate in FY 2021, compared to our original projections for the year. While generating estimates of future demand is incredibly challenging, given the unprecedented nature of our current circumstances and the unknowable trajectory of the pandemic, the data available to us support this assumption. Current demand has dropped to as low as 5 percent of normal, but we know from recent polls that approximately half of those surveyed expressed reluctance to ride a train in the next six months, and that more than a third said it would be more than a year before they would do so. Most demand predictions anticipate a second wave of COVID-19 impacts in the fall, and that further complicates any forecast. Further, when demand returns, we anticipate that changed behaviors, such as increased telework and reduced discretionary income will likely impact ridership, along with capacity limits that may be needed to achieve social distancing on our trains.

In the long term, there is reason to think that once the pandemic is behind us and with the availability of a vaccine we might see a wider return to the old normal, but even in that optimistic scenario, there are likely to be lingering economic and behavioral changes that may complicate customers' demand for certain transportation options. Amtrak anticipates working with Congress, the states, and a range of other stakeholders to navigate these changes and adapt our services in appropriate ways to ensure the ongoing safety and relevance of our products.

Amtrak's frontline employees, on trains, in stations, and in the field, have all faced significant challenges as they have performed their duties as this pandemic has unfolded. Their resilience and dedication have been inspiring and reflects their pride in the essential service they know they are delivering to the traveling public. Amtrak has worked hard to provide them with the safest possible workplace, and the list found above summarizes the key steps taken to safeguard their wellbeing.

Amtrak has adopted a range of measures designed to follow medical guidance and ensure the safety of our passengers. These measures can be found in the response to the first question above.

Regarding additional guidance or support that would be useful from the U.S. Department of Transportation, other federal agencies, and from Congress, Amtrak has appreciated the advice and guidance we have received from numerous agencies as we have developed our responses to this pandemic, always seeking to maximize our ability to provide essential mobility while ensuring the safety of our employees and our customers. Ultimately, what we need from Congress at this time is additional investment in FY 2021. As you are likely aware, Amtrak recently submitted a supplemental request for \$1.475 billion in additional funds for next fiscal year. This funding, which would supplement the \$2.04 billion request Amtrak submitted to Congress in February, would help us maintain minimum service levels across our network, provide funding to Amtrak in lieu of state and commuter payments that will be difficult for our partners to provide, and continue our program of capital investment for the future.



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While we await congressional action on FY 2021, it is important that we thank Congress for its support in FY 2020. In particular, the assistance extended to Amtrak through the CARES Act was essential, and Amtrak and its employees are very grateful for it. Coupled with various cost savings initiatives, the emergency CARES funds helped Amtrak minimize more dramatic impacts to our workforce, service, and capital projects for the current fiscal year.

Amtrak is proud of the mobility we have delivered to the nation throughout this crisis, and we look forward to being an essential part of the nation's ultimate recovery. We thank you for your support, and we look forward to working with you as we confront the hard decisions before us. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Flynn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

William J. Flynn

President & Chief Executive Officer