

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

“Nominations of Anthony Coscia, David Capozzi, Christopher Koos, Robin Wiessmann, and Samuel Lathem to be Directors of the AMTRAK Board of Directors; and Robert Primus to be a Member of the Surface Transportation Board”

10:00 AM, September 7, 2022

Questions for the Record from Chair Cantwell to Mr. Anthony Coscia

Amtrak’s Workforce. Workforce issues threaten Amtrak’s ability to restore service to pre-pandemic levels and effectively execute projects using the \$22 billion for Amtrak that was included as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Amtrak Cascades has not been running trains to Vancouver, B.C. since the start of the pandemic despite the Canadian border being open for almost a year. This has left five communities in my Washington state without any rail service.

Question 1: As a Board Member it will be your responsibility to set the company’s priorities. Will you make addressing Amtrak’s workforce issues a top priority if you are confirmed?

Answer: If confirmed, I commit to making Amtrak’s workforce a top priority. Upon receiving the necessary federal funding to restore service suspended due to the pandemic, the company has undertaken its largest recruiting, hiring, and training campaign in decades and, despite the unusually tight labor market, has hired over 3,200 new employees across our 46-state network. Rigorous training as well as route- and equipment-specific qualification requirements mean that even after we hire new employees, it takes many months to fill needed roles in the field. By October 3, we will restore 91% of our National Network frequencies, including a roundtrip between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. by September 26th. In addition, along with our state partners, we are working vigorously across the network to restore the remaining 9% of services, as soon as possible. I recognize the critical importance of this issue and its impact on the system.

Question 2: Will you commit to holding Amtrak accountable for developing and implementing a workforce development plan that ensures the company is able to fully restore service to 10 routes nationwide that are not operating at pre-pandemic levels and prepares the company to expand service as encouraged in the bipartisan infrastructure law?

Answer: If confirmed, yes, I will absolutely continue to commit to holding Amtrak accountable for developing and implementing a workforce development plan as you outline above, consistent with federal law and state partner participation where applicable. The company already started this important work and I will continue to ensure it progresses according to plan.

Questions from Senator Klobuchar to Mr. Anthony R. Coscia

Empire Builder, Rural Communities, and Economic Impact. The Empire Builder—one of Amtrak’s longest rail lines that goes from Chicago to the west coast—provides a vital link for many rural towns in Minnesota helping students get to college, workers to job centers and tourists to travel destinations. The rail line contributes \$327 million to the economies of the states in which it operates, including Minnesota.

Question 1. If confirmed, will you commit to working to improve passenger rail on long-distance routes that connect rural areas to urban centers?

Answer: Yes, if confirmed, I commit to improving our long-distance network. This is something we strive for every day at Amtrak.

Question 2. Can you speak to the economic importance of routes like the Northern Lights Express (NLX) and the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail (TCMC) for rural communities?

Answer: The Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Transportation jointly envision an additional daily frequency between the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee, and Chicago, Illinois. Additional frequencies are described in the Wisconsin State Rail Plan, including extending three Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha round trips to Minneapolis-St. Paul. These trips could be split between two routes, one via La Crosse, WI, the other via Eau Claire, WI. Amtrak’s Empire Builder provides a fourth daily trip via the existing La Crosse route. This new corridor would provide eastern Minnesota and central Wisconsin residents with greatly increased mobility options among the region’s largest cities, creating economic opportunity and greater access to core services such as medical care.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation proposes the vision for this service to include four round trips between Duluth-Superior-Minneapolis. This new corridor would provide residents of the Twin Ports of Duluth/Superior with increased mobility options to and from the state’s largest metropolitan area.

Amtrak supports the further planning and development of both of these visions and included them in the Amtrak Connects US plan, our proposal for expanded service put forward here: www.amtrakconnectsus.com. We look forward to working with the state DOTs, host railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration, and other stakeholders to help to advance their rail priorities.

Questions for the Record from Hon. Sinema to Mr. Coscia

Amtrak Investments in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. I was proud to lead negotiations that resulted in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) becoming law. The IIJA provided \$22 billion in grants for Amtrak over five years, including \$6 billion for the Northeast Corridor and \$16 billion for the National Network. The IIJA also

included \$36 billion over five years for grants for federal and state partnerships for intercity passenger rail, with stipulations that no more than \$24 billion may be awarded to the Northeast Corridor and at least \$12 billion must go towards projects on the National Network. Amtrak is also eligible to apply for other multimodal grant programs administered by Department of Transportation, including the National Project Assistance Program and Local and Regional Project Assistance Program

Question: What does Amtrak plan to accomplish system-wide with this significant investment in passenger rail infrastructure?

Answer: Amtrak greatly appreciates the unprecedented levels of investment in Amtrak and intercity passenger rail that you and your colleagues enacted with the support of the Biden Administration. As you know, the funding provided directly to Amtrak is specifically targeted to address the state-of-good-repair backlog across Amtrak's system. Therefore, we initially plan to use the \$22 billion to rehabilitate or replace old assets, including purchasing new intercity trainsets and long-distance cars and locomotives, improving maintenance facilities, undertaking critical capital projects defined by the IIJA, achieving full ADA compliance at our stations, providing matching funds for certain federal grants, and modernizing core technology systems. We look forward to working with the FRA as they initiate grant programs and funding in the coming years, as well as with our state and commuter partners, to address the needs across the system.

Amtrak Expansion. Phoenix is the largest American city that does not have downtown Amtrak service. Residents in the Phoenix metropolitan area must currently travel nearly an hour south of Phoenix to the nearest Amtrak station in Maricopa to access Amtrak service. I was excited to see that Amtrak released a proposal in July 2021 that would expand Amtrak service in Arizona and create a new route between Tucson and Phoenix. This proposal has the support of a number of local mayors in Maricopa County and southern Arizona.

Question: What are your thoughts on expanding Amtrak's system? What procedures will Amtrak use to consider new routes?

Answer: I fully support the expansion of the Amtrak system. We proposed a number of new ideas for new and expanded service across the network, including in Arizona, in our Amtrak Connects US vision (www.amtrakconnectsus.com). In the IIJA, Congress set forth a process, managed by FRA, which sets up a new federal program for developing new and enhanced corridors, the Corridor ID Program. We look forward to working with FRA as they identify new corridors and evaluate proposals from States, Amtrak, and other eligible applicants for new or expanded service.

Commitment to National Network. I joined my colleague, Senator Moran, to request your support for Amtrak's national network, including the Southwest Chief, which serves three communities in northern Arizona. I was disappointed in your response to my and Senator Moran's letter, which did not appear to convey enthusiasm for the benefits of long-distance service.

Daily service on our national routes enables Americans living in communities large and small to access affordable transportation to reach their final destinations. In Arizona, the long-distance service supports tourism, allows visitors to enjoy our national parks, and creates jobs.

Question: Will you reaffirm your commitment to maintaining daily service on Amtrak's National Network, including the Southwest Chief, Sunset Limited, and Texas Eagle in Arizona?

Answer: Yes, I reaffirm my commitment to long-distance service, including daily service on the Southwest Chief. Importantly, daily service is a reality made possible thanks to Congress' policy and funding support in every appropriations cycle. We greatly appreciate that effort. Regarding expanding tri-weekly service to daily service on existing long-distance routes such as the Sunset Limited and Texas Eagle, the IIJA requires the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to conduct a study to evaluate such opportunities. Amtrak will consult with and support the FRA on this important work. Prior to the completion of this work and any efforts to carry out any of the study's recommendations, I commit to maintaining the current level of service for these important routes and look forward to learning more about potential opportunities to expand long-distance service frequencies in Arizona and across the country once the study is complete.

Questions for the Record from Senator Rosen to Mr. Anthony Coscia

Northern Nevada Passenger Rail Service. Amtrak's California Zephyr line serves Northern Nevada and is a vital link to three communities in the state: Elko, Winnemucca, and Reno. The 84,000 travelers who travel on the line annually depend on the service, including many of our rural veterans and seniors who use Amtrak to access medical care in Reno. The Zephyr line also economically connects our rural communities with the growing Reno-Sparks metro area.

The news has well-covered this summer's air travel challenges, but rail service has not been immune to delays and cancellations either. The California Zephyr line has experienced multiple-hour delays, with some customers arriving up to six hours late, leading to missed connections. And unlike on the East Coast, customers in the West have limited options along these routes to rebook after being delayed due to no fault of their own. Moreover, delays not only impact the public's time; they also have a significant economic impact on fuel, labor, and lost revenue.

Question 1: To each of the nominees to the Amtrak Board, can I get a commitment from you to work to ensure people in Nevada, as well as other rural communities, have access to reliable passenger service? Specifically, how will you address the kinds of delays on long-distance lines we experienced this summer? Let's begin with Mr. Capozzi, then Mr. Coscia, Mr. Koos, Mr. Lathem, and finally Ms. Wiessman.

Answer: I support our long-distance service in Nevada and resolving the issue of delays is critical to the future of this service. Currently, not a single long-distance route is meeting the customer on-time performance standards set by the FRA for these trains. Freight train interference is the most common cause of Amtrak delays. Congress required the freights, as the host railroad to much of Amtrak National Network services, to give Amtrak trains preference in dispatching over freight trains. In practice, this is unenforced by the Department of Justice, the

agency with enforcement authority, creating abysmal on-time performance on all Amtrak long-distance lines. Real enforcement is necessary for Amtrak trains to run on time and Amtrak is preparing to seek investigations into poor performance, as permitted by law. Additionally, the company continues to seek authority to pursue preference violations in court directly through changes in law. Finally, Amtrak requested cooperation from our hosts in identifying possible investment opportunities where legitimate capacity or infrastructure condition issues inhibit Amtrak performance. We are hopeful that such win-win partnerships can be developed to take advantage of the historic funding included in the IIJA for passenger rail.

Question 2: I would also encourage and invite you to come out to Northern Nevada to hear from the residents of Winnemucca, Reno, and Elko first-hand about the importance of a reliable, functioning Zephyr line. Can I get your commitment that the Board will at some point in the next two years host a meeting in Northern Nevada to hear directly from my constituents? Let's begin with Mr. Capozzi and then go down the line again.

Answer: I would be happy to visit Northern Nevada and hear from your constituents.

Railroad Labor Shortage. As a result of the pandemic, Amtrak has been struggling to retain workers, making it difficult to recover and expand their services. In June, Amtrak received an \$8 million grant from the Federal Railroad Association for a worker training program to improve their recruitment and retention. This funding will be used to launch a mechanical training program that will run over the next 3 years in major hub cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

Question 1: To Mr. Coscia and Ms. Wiessman, can you talk about how the board plans to use this funding to attract and retain new hires?

Answer: Amtrak is already advancing a number of initiatives to attract new hires, including an employee referral program, sign-on bonuses, and relocation offerings, as well as a robust recruitment marketing strategy, military recruitment and engagement, school partnerships, dozens of hiring events across the country, internships, and retention programs. Regarding the Amtrak Mechanical Apprenticeship Program, we were recently awarded \$8 million through the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program to support this effort. We anticipate the apprenticeship program will grow to include multiple crafts paths – including sheet metal workers and electricians.

Question 2: And as a company with less than 20% of its workforce made up of women, how will Amtrak use this funding to attract and retain more women especially in skilled labor and trades whereas a whole they are woefully underrepresented?

Answer: In addition to the initiatives above, Amtrak importantly focuses on diversity recruitment partnerships. We partner with multiple organizations to increase diversity, including National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE); Society of Women Engineers (SWE); Women in Technology; Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA); Disability Engagement; and Campus Pride Alliance. Specifically, we launched a shop craft apprenticeship program, looking to train our own electricians, machinists, car repair personnel, sheet metal workers and boilermakers.

As part of this initiative, we set a goal to increase women's representation in those skilled craft areas. I am happy to work with your office on this issue.

Questions for the Record from Senator Luján to Mr. Anthony Coscia

Hiring. I would like to get some information from you on current hiring levels and efforts in New Mexico.

Question 1: How many positions are currently filled in New Mexico, including engineers and station agents?

Question 2: How many positions are currently open in New Mexico, including engineers and station agents, for Amtrak to be at full staff and to meet its current hiring goals?

Question 3: How is Amtrak advertising open positions in New Mexico?

Answer: As of September 15, 2022, Amtrak is currently seeking to fill two positions for customer service representatives in Raton, New Mexico. Currently, there are nine other open positions that are no longer advertised as they have candidates in the offer and background check stages. Those nine positions include four customer service representatives, two passenger conductor trainees, two passenger engineer trainees, one product line agent and three road foremen. Open positions are posted on careers.amtrak.com. Interested applicants can sort the careers page by state and department. We also post to job boards such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and Zip Recruiter and will consider local hiring events as needed to fill these positions in the coming fiscal year.

Delays. I've heard from my constituents that there have been significant delays on the Southwest Chief line over the past year. According to Amtrak, only 7.3% of customers on the Southwest Chief line arrived at their destination on time in June of this year.

To call this "unreliable service" is a severe understatement. If we want to increase ridership, improve, and expand long-distance rail—a priority I believe we all share—the service MUST be reliable.

Question 1: What are the primary causes of delays on Amtrak's long-distance rail, and specifically on the Southwest Chief?

Question 2: How often have equipment and mechanical issues been the cause of delays on the Southwest Chief over the past year?

Question 3: How often have staffing and crew shortages been the cause of delays on the Southwest Chief over the past year?

Question 4: What is Amtrak doing to reduce delays and improve on time performance?

Question 5: In June, only 7.3% of Southwest Chief customers arrived to their destination on time. What is Amtrak's goal for on time performance for the Southwest Chief in June of 2023?

Answer: I share your frustration with the on-time performance of our long-distance trains, and the Southwest Chief is no exception. In answer to all your questions in this section, freight train interference is the most common cause of Amtrak delays. Congress required freights, as the host railroad to much of Amtrak National Network service, to give Amtrak trains preference in dispatching over freight trains. In practice, this is rarely enforced, creating abysmal on-time performance on all Amtrak long-distance lines. Real enforcement is necessary for Amtrak trains to run on time.

Amtrak mechanical and equipment failures resulted in only 6% of all delays to the Southwest Chief, while crew and system delays also accounted for another 6% of all delays. Amtrak is fully engaged in hiring and training more employees to better help with workforce issues—both onboard and in mechanical/yard facilities. The Chicago-area, especially, is stretched thin with mechanical staff. This can lead to delays in turning around the inbound equipment and fixing mechanical issues. Chicago is a major Amtrak hub and where the Southwest Chief originates.

Amtrak is engaged at all levels with BNSF, our primary host railroad for this route, to mitigate delays and improve passenger performance. However, over the most recent 12 months (Sep 21-Aug 22), host-responsible delays were nearly 70% of delays. The three largest causes of delay on the Southwest Chief are 1) freight train interference (31% of all delays), 2) slow orders (11%) and 3) signal delays (10%). Currently, the Southwest Chief is not meeting the minimum standard of 80% customer on-time performance established by the FRA. The customer on-time performance for the Southwest Chief was 40.4% in Q1 2022 and just 15.3% in Q2 2022.

I am eager to work with you and your staff to address this existential issue for long-distance service.

Long-distance Rail & the Southwest Chief. I appreciate my colleague Senator Moran's advocacy for long-distance rail, including the Southwest Chief line that New Mexicans rely on to connect to the rest of the country. I also appreciate your commitments to improving and expanding long-distance rail if confirmed to this position.

I was proud to support the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included \$66 billion in direct funding for passenger and freight rail repairs, safety, upgrades, and service expansion. This funding will help address years of underinvestment, including in our long-distance rail lines like the Southwest Chief. Over the past few years, equipment shortages and mechanical failures have increasingly led to delays and cancellations on Amtrak routes across the country, and it's long past time to invest in our long-distance rail network to upgrade and improve Amtrak's passenger rail car fleet.

I'd like to hear more about each of your visions for our long-distance rail network as you work to deploy funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Question 1: What are the greatest issues facing our long-distance rail network right now, and what are the first steps that Amtrak should take to address those concerns?

Answer: The largest issues facing long-distance include replacing the current aged fleet with a new long-distance fleet, hiring up to address workforce needs, making station improvements, enhancing the customer experience, and improving on-time performance. Amtrak is already addressing many of these concerns and IIJA provides much needed funding to help with capital investments. However, as I noted in my previous answer, freight train interference remains a significant concern for passenger trains.

Question 2: If the funding in IIJA is not enough to bring all of the trains up to Amtrak's standard, how would you advise Amtrak to decide which trains and which lines get much-needed upgrades? Will it be based on ridership levels, age and standard of the current equipment, or other factors?

Answer: We anticipate that the IIJA provides Amtrak sufficient funds to address the replacement of much of our aged equipment used for the services we provide today. However, this will, in part, depend on the availability and cost of American-sourced trains to replace the existing long-distance fleet, which will become clearer as we begin the procurement process. Beyond the near term, we will continue to seek annual appropriations and other funding sources for additional capital needs that the IIJA would not support.

Question for the Record from Senator John Hickenlooper to Mr. Coscia

Amtrak Front Range Rail. Board of Director nominees, as you are probably aware, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) authorized funds for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail program to expand Amtrak's intercity service routes, including \$12 billion for the National Network. This funding may be used to improve an existing corridor or build a brand-new passenger rail route.

Amtrak's California Zephyr is an East-West route which passes through Colorado and connects our state to the West Coast and the Midwest. However, Colorado's Front Range currently lacks a North-South service route connecting Colorado's cities of Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The newly proposed Front Range Passenger Rail would provide additional economic opportunities and expand transit options for many communities along the proposed route.

Question: Mr. Coscia, Mr. Capozzi, Mr. Koos, Ms. Wiessmann, and Mr. Lathem, if confirmed to the Board of Amtrak, how would you help ensure Amtrak's National Network routes meet the needs of Mountain West communities?

Answer: Amtrak proposed a number of new routes and frequencies with its Amtrak Connects US vision (www.amtrakconnectsus.com). Congress passed in the IIJA a new FRA Corridor ID program to identify new opportunities for corridor routes. States and other eligible entities should submit expressions of interest to FRA via the docket (<https://www.regulations.gov/docket/FRA-2022-0031>) and work within new federal programs to progress these route opportunities. The Front Range is an exciting opportunity, and I am eager to work with your staff on this potential service and other passenger rail issues important to Coloradans.