

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 Mayor Christopher Koos

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.

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, I 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.

Questions from Senator Klobuchar to Mr. Christopher Koos

Amtrak’s On-Time Performance. Many passengers consider on-time performance when choosing a mode of transportation. While Amtrak experienced its best operational performance ever in 2018, many long-distance routes still suffer from poor on-time performance. A number of people in my state have written to me this summer to report their Amtrak trains being delayed by as much as ten hours. In 2020, only 58 percent of Amtrak long-distance trains arrived at their stops on-time, while 86 percent of Northeast Corridor trains and 80 percent of state-supported trains arrived on time.

Question 1: Why are long-distance routes more likely to suffer from poor on-time performance than other routes?

Answer: It's my understanding that 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 numbers on Amtrak long-distance lines.

Question 2: If confirmed, what will you do to improve Amtrak's on-time performance?

Answer: On-time performance for Amtrak long-distance trains is crucial. Real enforcement is necessary for Amtrak trains to run on time. Senator Durbin has introduced a bill to address these concerns, which Amtrak supports.

Question for the Record from Senator Duckworth to Mayor Christopher Koos

Chicago Union Station Access Project. Amtrak joined a diverse coalition in a recent MEGA grant application for the Chicago Union Station Access Project, which, if awarded, would transform Chicago Union Station and lay a foundation for better Amtrak service across the Midwest.

In Illinois, this would mean reduced travel time from Chicago to Central and Southern Illinois and improved rail access to O'Hare. However, this project isn't just about Illinois. It would also improve tracks in Michigan and help Amtrak build toward better service across the region. Chicago is Amtrak's busiest station outside of the Northeast and is critical to the flow of passenger rail service across the Midwest. Many of Amtrak's routes through the Midwest run through Chicago. Service to Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri and Nebraska are all impacted by tracks that run through Chicago.

Question: Can you explain why improvements into and out of Chicago are so critical to the region and why the Chicago Union Station Access Project is so important to passengers across the Midwest and around the country?

Answer: I understand that Amtrak is working with the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois and Metra, the Chicago area commuter authority, to seek a grant under the Mega Program. I understand this would enable Amtrak to further advance the redevelopment of Amtrak's Chicago Union Station and create a better route into Union Station for two state-supported and two long-distance routes. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about this proposal and working with you on this important issue for the City, the State and the Amtrak network.

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

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: It is my understanding that Amtrak initially plans to use the \$22 billion to rehabilitate or replace old assets include new trainsets, new fleet (cars and locomotives), improved maintenance facilities, capital projects defined by the IIJA, ADA compliance, and matching funds for certain federal grants, among other improvements. I 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. If confirmed, I intend to get up to speed as quick as possible with these plans for the Amtrak 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: If confirmed, I intend to learn as much as possible about the opportunities for expansion of the Amtrak system, as well as the FRA programs that may support such expansion. I would also be very interested to learn more about any potential opportunities in Arizona, including the route between Tucson and Phoenix that you mentioned, and to work with you and your staff.

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. It is my understanding that pre-pandemic, the Sunset Limited/Texas Eagle segment that operates through Arizona only operated three times per week, and I commit to maintaining this level of service, and in fact, learning more about opportunities to increase it.

Questions for the Record from Senator Rosen to Mayor Christopher Koos

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: It's my understanding that 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.

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 cannot speak to the Board's official schedule, but if confirmed, I would be happy to visit Northern Nevada and hear from your constituents.

Questions for the Record from Senator Luján to Mr. Christopher Koos

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: If confirmed, I plan to learn much more about these concerns. As I understand it today, the largest issues facing long-distance include the need to replace current aged fleet with new long-distance fleet, hiring up to address workforce needs, station improvements, enhancing the customer experience, and improving on-time performance, especially due to freight train interference. From what I know, Amtrak is already addressing many of these concerns and IIJA provides much needed funding to help with capital investments. It is my understanding that freight train interference remains a problem for passenger trains, and I look forward to working with you and your staff to learn more about this issue.

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: I don't know how Amtrak would make those decisions, but if confirmed, I hope to learn more about where Amtrak stands in applying IIJA investment to its fleet, stations and other infrastructure in the National Network.

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

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: From what I know, Amtrak has proposed a number of new routes and frequencies with its Amtrak Connects US (www.amtrakconnectsus.com) vision. Congress passed in the IIJA a new FRA Corridor ID program to identify new opportunities for corridor routes. States and other eligible entities should express their interest to FRA and work within new federal programs to advance these route opportunities. I have heard that the Front Range is an exciting opportunity and I hope to learn more about it and work with you and your staff on issues important to Coloradans.