

Testimony

Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee Public Hearing

May 23, 2013 – Point Park University – Pittsburgh

Submitted by Mark Spada on behalf of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail

Good morning. My name is Mark Spada, Secretary of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail (WPPR), a non-profit organization dedicated to the improvement and expansion of passenger rail service throughout Western Pennsylvania. I am here to address the subject of today's hearing, service in the Harrisburg-Pittsburgh corridor. On behalf of WPPR, thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present the following testimony.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 requires states to fund the majority of operating expenses of short-distance trains, trains whose routes are fewer than 750 miles, starting October 1 of this year. This includes Amtrak's Pennsylvanian which runs between New York, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh with stops at several intermediate western and central Pennsylvania communities. An agreement was reached in March between Pennsylvania and Amtrak on an amount the state will fund for continued operation of the train, an amount our organization obviously encourages the state to include in its final budget.

Much of the impetus driving the agreement was an outpouring of support for the Pennsylvanian received by state legislators, the governor's office and PennDOT from citizens, public officials, the business community, colleges and organizations such as WPPR. Several state legislators publicly noted the unexpected number of pro-Pennsylvanian correspondences they received from constituents. Further, there were media reports that told of sold-out Pennsylvanians such as the one WPPR President Michael Alexander rode from Pittsburgh to speak at a well-attended public rally in Huntingdon, one of several rallies held in favor of funding the train. However, despite all of this, some still view the Pennsylvanian as a train that few ride along a route that should not be served. Thus, the following information is offered to both dispel that perception as well as provide data that becomes more relevant since the state is in the position to assume greater responsibility for the operation, funding and promotion of the Pennsylvanian beginning October 1.

Amtrak carried the largest number of riders in its history, over 31 million, in FY 2012. The Pennsylvanian contributed to that record with its all-time high of 212,006 riders, a 2.2%

increase over 2011 (Amtrak Monthly Performance Report September 2012, Exhibit 1). That success has carried over to 2013. Through the first six months of 2013 (October 2012 – March 2013), the Pennsylvanian carried 4.3% more riders than the same period in 2012 (Amtrak Monthly Performance Report March 2013, Exhibit 2). However, that is not the most noteworthy figure for the first six months of 2013. During that time, the Pennsylvanian achieved a 14.1% increase in ticket revenue over the same period a year ago. That was the largest percentage increase of any train on the Amtrak system. These gains in ridership and revenue resulted in an average ticket price of \$48.21 during the first six months of 2013, a 10.1% increase over 2012's average of \$43.78. Additionally, the average trip length on the Pennsylvanian was approximately 230 miles in 2012 and 228 miles the first six months of 2013. Thus, the data indicates that through the first half of 2013, more people paid a higher fare to ride virtually the same distance on the Pennsylvanian compared to 2012. This suggests that the demand for a seat on the Pennsylvanian has grown as an increasing number of travelers view the train as a good value for their transportation dollar.

The average trip length of 230 miles also illustrates the importance and use of the Pennsylvanian west of Harrisburg. This distance is most closely equivalent to a trip between New York and Lewistown or Philadelphia and Altoona. Thus, the train is not just another choice for riders along the Keystone or Northeast Corridors. In fact, 40% of all Pennsylvanian riders board the train at the seven stations between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh (Amtrak Fact Sheet, FY 2012, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Exhibit 3).

Another measure of the performance of the Pennsylvanian and a way to analyze the potential of the route is to compare the train to others in the Amtrak system. A widely used performance measure is passenger-miles per train-mile, essentially the average number of riders on a train. At a figure of 192, the Pennsylvanian ranked 16th among the 44 trains and routes listed in a Federal Railroad Administration report (Rail Service and Performance: Quarter Ended December 31, 2012, Exhibit 4). The Amtrak average is 180 (Amtrak Annual Report 2012, Exhibit 5). Therefore, at any given time, more Amtrak riders are enjoying the sights of Lewistown, Huntingdon, Altoona, Johnstown and Greensburg than views of Dallas, Atlanta, Denver, Vermont, or New Mexico. In fact, the routes with the highest averages, except for the unique Auto Train, are the Carolinian and the trains serving Richmond, Newport News and

Lynchburg, Virginia. This is not unexpected since the states of Virginia and North Carolina have made strong commitments to improving their respective passenger rail services.

Perhaps the most relevant comparison for the Pennsylvanian is to look at the performance numbers of the Keystone Service trains that run between Harrisburg and Philadelphia or New York. Helped by Pennsylvania-funded investments in equipment and infrastructure, Keystone ridership rose to over 1.4 million riders in 2012 with 13 weekday trains (does not include the Pennsylvanian) from which to choose. The service is considered by many to be a great success. Thus, the final few figures should be of particular interest to the committee.

Keystone trains averaged 143 passenger-miles per train-mile compared to the Pennsylvanian's figure of 192. The other relevant numbers are 60 and 40, the percentage of available seats filled by the Pennsylvanian and Keystone trains, respectively, in 2012. The Amtrak average is 53. If the Keystone Service is considered to be a well-utilized line, then the Pennsylvanian's stronger performance measures suggest it should be viewed in the same light. Further, the lower figures for the Keystone Service are largely due to the number of available trains and seats. Keystone ridership began to see significant gains as the number of trains increased. As has been shown nationwide, more frequent and convenient service will result in larger numbers of riders. The state has also partnered with Amtrak in creating PA Trips By Train, a program that promotes Keystone Service travel and excursions. The result of these efforts is the Keystone Service becoming a highly desirable transportation alternative capable of handling its steadily increasing ridership. The state can achieve the same success on the Pennsylvanian's route by implementing similar operating and marketing initiatives.

The data presented in this testimony illustrates the successful performance and use of the Pennsylvanian. Also, Pennsylvania has shown its ability to improve and expand passenger rail service that results in significant ridership gains. Based on an already strong and steadily growing use of the Pennsylvanian, WPPR is confident similar goals can be achieved along the Harrisburg-Pittsburgh corridor. Thank you for your time and consideration.

