

Senator Patrick Toomey  
United States Senate  
248 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
June 22, 2020

Dear Senator Toomey,

Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail (WPPR) is a citizen's advocacy group working for more and improved passenger rail service in western Pennsylvania. Although WPPR's primary focus is increasing service on the Pittsburgh – Harrisburg segment of the *Pennsylvanian* route, we are also interested in Pennsylvania's long-distance passenger rail service.

Amtrak currently runs two daily long-distance trains in the western part of the state: the Chicago – Pittsburgh – Washington, DC *Capitol Limited* and the Chicago – Erie – New York *Lake Shore Limited*. On June 15, 2020, Amtrak announced that effective October 1, 2020, all long-distance trains, except for the Virginia – Florida *Auto-Train*, will be operated only three times per week to limit operating deficits due to sharply reduced ridership caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If demand warrants, Amtrak says daily service will be restored to some or all routes in summer 2021.

However, while Amtrak's goal of improving its financial position is understandable, WPPR believes this action will exacerbate its deficit and jeopardize the long-term viability of much of its national network.

Most of Amtrak's long-distance routes operate with only one daily train in each direction. Such service limits the convenience of much of Amtrak's network. Less than daily operation will make the long-distance trains even less convenient for travelers, for example, going from Pittsburgh or Erie must change trains in Chicago to get to New Orleans, Denver, Los Angeles, or Seattle. If service reductions result in fewer riders, any savings in reduced operating costs will be off-set by lower revenues.

In addition, WPPR is concerned that the temporary reduction of long-distance train frequency may cause the host railroads to demand exorbitant amounts of money from Amtrak to restore daily operation. For example, in 2010, when Amtrak conducted a study of operating its tri-weekly New Orleans – Los Angeles *Sunset Limited* as a daily train, Union Pacific stated that \$750 million worth of improvements would be required to increase frequency to daily service, for one train in each direction!

Lastly, reducing daily service sets a poor precedent. At a time when intercity travel options are limited and airlines are scaling back service, every effort should be made to maintain the national rail network at existing service levels to provide the basis for expansion when national economic conditions improve.

Sincerely,

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