January 9, 2019

New Jersey Congressional Delegation (Distribution Attached)

Re: Amtrak Policies under CEO Richard Anderson

Honorable Members of the Congressional Delegation of New Jersey:

Amtrak has been in the news of late. The press is generally unfavorable; but, deserved. It is what prompts the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP, www.nj-arp.org) to write each of you.

NJ-ARP is the premiere rail advocacy group for the state of New Jersey. We are a not-for-profit organization established in 1980. Our mission is to give New Jersey residents a greater voice in deciding their transit future. We have played an active role in the implementation of new rail services, restoration of discontinued services and improved customer service. Our mission extends to Amtrak as what happens with Amtrak elsewhere in the U.S. has repercussions in New Jersey along the busy Northeast Corridor (NEC), utilized extensively by New Jersey Transit (NJT).

Attached is a copy of our July 10, 2018 letter to Amtrak Chairman of the Board Anthony Coscia. The letter, which is self-explanatory, requests that Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson be replaced. Mr. Anderson was previously CEO of Delta Airlines and has come to Amtrak without any knowledge of the rail industry. We never received a reply from Mr. Coscia on our letter. It has remained “business as usual” at Amtrak. To NJ-ARP that is unacceptable and I ask you to assist us as New Jersey’s collective voice in Congress.

Besides discontinuing senior and student discounts, drastically downscaling meal service on long-distance service without any corresponding fare reductions, and eliminating the “Toys for Tots” program implemented by Amtrak at its very creation, he has embarked on an apparent mission to dismantle the very rail system he was charged to improve. His most recent gambit was to seek discontinuance of the “Southwest Chief”, one of the backbone trains of our national passenger rail network. This train operates between Chicago and Los Angeles. While very few people will ride the “Southwest Chief” end to end, in many cases, it provides the only means of public transportation between intermediate cities. One example would be between La Junta, CO and Albuquerque, NM. Should the “Southwest Chief” be discontinued, critical congressional votes of Representatives and Senators from the affected states cannot be relied upon to support Amtrak’s NEC. That directly impacts New Jersey. We cannot take the risk of losing needed Congressional votes on the NEC from representatives of other states due to a mismanaging Amtrak CEO.

NJ-ARP requests the use of your good offices to “right the ship” at Amtrak by requesting that Amtrak appoint a CEO from the rail industry who truly understands what it takes to run a railroad and how to market it properly.

Sincerely,

Leonard Resto
President
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