



## Legislation Text

---

File #: 180324, Version: 0

---

### IMMEDIATE ADOPTION

180324

ORIGINAL

050592, 050794

ALD. BAUMAN

Resolution expressing the City of Milwaukee's opposition to any reduction of Amtrak's long-distance passenger train services and support for maintaining and expanding those services.

This resolution expresses the City of Milwaukee's opposition to any reductions to Amtrak's long-distance passenger rail services and the City's support for maintaining current long-distance services and expanding long-distance services where beneficial to the serve the public need. The City further urges the Amtrak Board of Directors, with the necessary review and approval of the U.S. Congress, to reverse the recent downgrading and reduction of Amtrak's long-distance services.

Whereas, The National Railroad Passenger Corporation, better known as "Amtrak," was created in 1971 as a quasi-public, federally-chartered corporation responsible for providing medium- and long-distance passenger rail service across the United States; and

Whereas, Amtrak operates a nationwide rail network, serving more than 500 destinations in 46 states, the District of Columbia and 3 Canadian provinces on more than 21,400 route-miles; and

Whereas, Nearly half of Amtrak's trains operate at top speeds of over 100 miles per hour, with some traveling at up to 150 miles per hour; and

Whereas, In fiscal year 2017, Amtrak set another ridership record, with customers taking 31.7 million trips; and

Whereas, Amtrak's services in Wisconsin include the Milwaukee-Chicago *Hiawatha Service* (with 7 trains daily) and the long-distance *Empire Builder*, which traverses the state on its route from Chicago, through Milwaukee, Columbus, Portage, Wisconsin Dells, Tomah and La Crosse, to the Twin Cities and Seattle; and

Whereas, In fiscal year 2017, the *Hiawatha Service* had ridership totaling 829,109, making it the 6<sup>th</sup> busiest Amtrak route outside the Northeast Corridor; and

Whereas, Amtrak operates 15 long-distance trains (including the aforementioned *Empire Builder*), with routes ranging in length from 780 miles to 2,728 miles; and

Whereas, These long-distance trains provide the only service at nearly half the stations in the Amtrak system and are the only Amtrak trains in 23 of the 46 states served by Amtrak; and

Whereas, Although 15% of Amtrak trips are made on long-distance trains, these trips account for roughly 40% of Amtrak passenger-miles; and

Whereas, While fares and other revenues cover an average of 37% of public mass transit operating costs, for Amtrak they cover more than 90%, even though Amtrak faces stiff competition from automobile, bus and air travel, all of which receive substantially higher government subsidies; and

Whereas, As the Midwest High Speed Rail Association and Rail Passenger Association noted in their study of the long-distance *Southwest Chief* service, Amtrak's long-distance trains "bring economically viable mobility to rural areas and small towns, many of which are becoming more isolated from major cities as regional airline and intercity bus service disappears"; and

Whereas, Amtrak's passenger rail services offer a viable alternative to personal car travel in a nation of overcrowded highways, ever-more-congested air travel system and deteriorating network of intercity bus service - particularly for disabled and elderly Americans, many of whom are unable to drive or fly; and

Whereas, According to Amtrak, in FY 2017, a total of 931,695 passengers used the 8 Wisconsin Amtrak stations (up 2.4% from FY 2016); and

Whereas, Amtrak spent \$12.7 million on the procurement of goods and services from Wisconsin businesses in FY 2017, and also paid almost \$4.7 million in wages to Wisconsin residents; and

Whereas, Amtrak also estimates that in 2016, tourist spending in Wisconsin from Amtrak passengers exceeded \$1.8 million, with approximately 214,000 Amtrak passengers being tourists; and

Whereas, The City of Milwaukee's investment in Amtrak includes the \$6.25 million in tax incremental district funding the City provided for the 2007 redevelopment of the previous circa-1965 rail station into the Milwaukee Intermodal Station; and

Whereas, In 2016, work was completed on a new \$22 million passenger concourse and train shed at the Intermodal Station, with a mezzanine and escalators and elevators that connect to new, ADA-compliant platforms; and

Whereas, Former Amtrak CEO and president Joe Boardman and others have recently warned that current Amtrak management has begun to dismantle Amtrak's interconnected, nationwide passenger rail service by downgrading and reducing its long-distance services; and

Whereas, Actions already taken in this regard include eliminating dining-car service on 2 long-distance trains, removing station agents and baggage handlers at 15 stations across the country, laying-off long-time local senior management employees with the most knowledge of passenger needs and operational best practices, and entertaining discussions of the possibility of converting long-distance routes into fragmented, short-distance routes, essentially eliminating network connectivity and single-seat, long-distance rides; and

Whereas, These actions and discussions have been orchestrated by Amtrak management and occurred behind closed doors, even though Amtrak was created by Congress by the people and for the people, and is partially funded by the nation's taxpayers; and

Whereas, Any significant changes in Amtrak policies or services should only be made through a

transparent public-input and legislative process; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, that the City of Milwaukee opposes any reductions to Amtrak's long-distance passenger rail services and, instead, supports maintaining current long-distance services and expanding long-distance services where beneficial to the serve the public need; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the City of Milwaukee urges the Amtrak Board of Directors, with the necessary review and approval of the U.S. Congress, to reverse the recent downgrading and reduction of Amtrak's long-distance services; and, be it

Further Resolved, That any significant changes to Amtrak's services, long-distance or otherwise, should only be made through a transparent, public process with formal legislative review and approval; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the City Clerk shall send copies of this resolution to all members of the Amtrak Board of Directors and Wisconsin's Congressional delegation.

LRB171392-1  
Jeff Osterman  
May 25, 2018