



**TESTIMONY OF  
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AMTRAK'S NORTHEAST CORRIDOR**

**PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
March 19, 1996**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. The relationship between Amtrak and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania -- Governor Ridge, Secretary Mallory, and the Legislature -- is very important to us. Not only does Pennsylvania have a long railroad history and tradition, but Amtrak and the Commonwealth today have a partnership that has helped us to provide passenger service for hundreds of thousands of customers. Maintaining this close working relationship is a personal priority of Amtrak's President Thomas Downs, as well as the CEOs of both Strategic Business Units (SBUs) that serve Pennsylvania.

Amtrak's Strategic Business Unit organization is predicated on the concept that the people running our trains should be close to our customers and to our partners. Here in Pennsylvania, that has meant working closely with our partners at Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation, with SEPTA, with our employees, with cities and towns, and with local Chambers of Commerce to improve every aspect of our Keystone service. In fact, Amtrak's working relationship in Pennsylvania is a model for the rest of

the company. We meet monthly with our employees and PennDoT to review the service and explore new ideas. These meetings have led to a variety of improvements. Amtrak now has local marketing based in Harrisburg; marketing initiatives aimed at local traffic (rather than national, generic ads); appearances at malls, fairs, and college campuses; a pilot parking program in Harrisburg; a brochure highlighting destinations on the Keystone line. We are developing localized menus for our long-distance trains, which will feature Pennsylvania-made products, and expanded thruway bus connections throughout the Commonwealth.

Our partnership with the Commonwealth extends beyond the current service as well. We are pleased that Pennsylvania recognizes the Keystone line as an integral component of its entire transportation network and is assessing its role as such. We are providing technical and historical assistance for this study.

Perhaps no event confirmed the importance of our partnership more than the Blizzard of '96. When Governor Ridge declared a travel emergency and banned all non-essential automobile traffic from the roads, passenger rail became not just an important mode of transportation for Pennsylvanians, but the only mode of transportation for Pennsylvanians.

Hundreds of Amtrak employees worked tirelessly -- putting in over 23,000 hours of work -- to keep that critical service available. Amtrak engineering forces worked around the

clock to dig out switches and keep them clear; they kept up a 24-hour surveillance of the electric catenary system that keeps Amtrak and SEPTA trains running in order to ensure that ice buildup, sagging wires, and tree limb interference did not bring down the wires; they shoveled snow to enable the block operators who control SEPTA and Amtrak trains to reach the control towers. Our operating crews remained on duty for extra hours to shovel platforms, as well as to prepare, stock, assemble and operate our trains through the blizzard. They took care of passengers stranded by the snowstorm, even manning a restaurant in Philadelphia's 30th Street station so passengers could have meals.

Without these extraordinary efforts by our employees, Amtrak would have been stalled. What may not be as evident is that SEPTA would have been immobilized as well, since all of SEPTA's seven regional rail lines operate over Amtrak tracks at some point. Just before the blizzard hit, Amtrak and SEPTA were in close contact to ensure that Amtrak personnel would be available throughout the storm to keep SEPTA operations moving.

Passenger rail was crucial to the resumption of Pennsylvania's normal patterns of life even after cars were allowed back on the roads. Although driving was once again legal, it was by no means easy. Commuter trains were packed. In this week too, Amtrak went beyond normal operations to assist Pennsylvanians. Our maintenance of way and operations forces worked overtime to keep tracks clear so commuter trains could keep running. Our own trains provided unscheduled service at SEPTA stops

such as Narberth and Overbrook when SEPTA trains were unable to meet demand.

Our employees work hard every day to provide quality rail service, often under trying circumstances. But I can not think of a time when more people put forth a greater effort to keep the people moving. Our employees came through in a very difficult situation -- extraordinary performance that was widely commended, across the country and on the national news.

When airports and roads were closed, Amtrak was running. Of the 94 Amtrak trains scheduled to run between Harrisburg and Philadelphia that week, 77 ran, and 28 of the 32 trains scheduled to run west of Harrisburg got through. The magnitude of the historic blizzard caused delays. But when all was said and done, if you wanted to go from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh or anywhere in between, Amtrak could get you there.

Of course, the continuation of service came at a cost. From January 7 through January 14, Amtrak spent over \$1 million to keep passenger rail available for Pennsylvanians. Unfortunately, our January weather problems did not end with the blizzard. Like much of central Pennsylvania, we too were affected by the floods. While the impact on Amtrak's finances -- \$56,000 in unanticipated maintenance and operations costs -- did not approach the impact of the blizzard, for an organization that must watch the bottom line as closely as we do, those costs add up.

The impact on Amtrak's budget was not limited to additional costs. For much of the month, the severe weather conditions held down our ridership and revenues. With increased costs, reduced revenues, and a Congressional mandate for operating self-sufficiency (free of federal operating support) by the turn of the century, Amtrak is faced with a very difficult juggling act.

Perhaps no state in the country was more adversely affected by this winter's weather than Pennsylvania. Between the blizzard and subsequent flooding, Pennsylvania witnessed an unprecedented level of disruption and destruction. As the Legislature considers ways to mitigate the effect of the blizzard and the floods on the many organizations adversely affected, Amtrak urges that you consider not only the cost to reopen closed modes of transportation, but also the cost of keeping open those modes of transportation that did not shut down. As you review the needs of the Commonwealth in the aftermath of the blizzard and the floods, I urge you to keep in mind the cost of meeting those needs during the blizzard and the floods.

I want to assure you that Amtrak is not beginning or ending its quest for emergency relief with the Pennsylvania Legislature. Since mid-January Amtrak has had ongoing discussions with Departments of Transportation in states in which emergencies were declared. We are pursuing recovery of Amtrak's extraordinary blizzard and flood costs from FEMA via state eligibility. We are also working to access FEMA assistance directly for Amtrak.

Like any business today, Amtrak is mindful of our bottom line. And like many other Pennsylvania businesses, our bottom line was significantly affected by January's weather. We owe it to our passengers -- your constituents -- to pursue all options to mitigate extraordinary costs, and we have done so. Today we are here to ask that as you consider the many legitimate costs that were incurred to return Pennsylvania to business as usual, you consider that Amtrak made a tremendous and costly effort to keep Pennsylvanians moving across the state, and up and down the Corridor on both Amtrak and SEPTA trains.

At Amtrak, our mission is to enable our passengers to reach their destination safely and dependably. That is, of course, the goal of any transportation system. In mid-January, passenger rail was one of the few modes of transportation -- and sometime the only mode of transportation -- to meet that mission. Pennsylvanians depended on us, and we delivered.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Amtrak Blizzard and Flood costs 1996

Activities	Costs
Blizzard: Sweep, clean, shovel interlockings on Corridor (DC-Philadelphia-NY) permitting use of track by Amtrak and SEPTA	\$ 482,145
Blizzard: Sweep, clean, shovel interlockings Philadelphia to Harrisburg permitting use of track by Amtrak and SEPTA	\$ 189,102
Blizzard: 24-hour surveillance of all electric catenaries for use by SEPTA and Amtrak	\$ 114,620
Blizzard: Maintain switch heaters at all above locations, permitting use of track by Amtrak and SEPTA	\$ 67,716
Blizzard: Remove snow on rights of ways to permit access to operating towers, permitting use of tracks by Amtrak and SEPTA	\$ 12,930
Blizzard: Overtime, lodging, food and other costs enabling crews to prepare, stock, assemble and operate Amtrak trains	\$ 84,460
Blizzard: Snow removal at platforms for passenger access	\$ 103,709
Blizzard: Lodging and meals for passengers stranded by storms	\$ 8,000
Flood: Track clearing and damage repair, Harrisburg area	\$ 31,000
Flood: Station personnel overtime	\$ 2,452
Flood: Engineer, conductor, mechanical personnel overtime	\$ 10,045
Flood: Alternative passenger transportation	\$ 11,575
Flood: Passenger food costs	\$ 954
TOTAL - Blizzard and flood	\$ 1,118,708