

**Statement of Arun Rao, Chair of the States for Passenger Rail Coalition, Inc.
(SPRC)
and Passenger Rail Manager, Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Railroads and Harbors Section**

to the

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials**

**Submitted November 16, 2020, for the record of the November 18, 2020 hearing:
Examining the Surface Transportation Board's Role in
Ensuring a Robust Passenger Rail System**

The States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC) is an alliance of 23 State and Regional Transportation Officials and Passenger Rail Authorities across the United States. SPRC's mission is to promote the development, implementation, and expansion of Intercity Passenger Rail as part of an integrated national transportation network.

SPRC members sponsor a combined 29 intercity passenger rail routes serving 296 communities across America. In the year leading up to the pandemic, the State Supported trains carried over 15 million passengers, representing over 47% of Amtrak's total ridership, the largest source of ridership among the three Amtrak business lines. They also contributed nearly \$750 million to Amtrak, through a combination of \$521 million in passenger revenue plus \$225 million in contract payments. We are poised to return to these pre-pandemic levels as the Nation's health and economy improve, and the traveling public returns to take advantage of the beneficial economic, health, and safety aspects of traveling by passenger rail.

SPRC appreciates this opportunity to provide comments as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee examines the Surface Transportation Board's (STB) role in ensuring a robust passenger rail system. The STB has regulatory authority that involves multiple Amtrak matters, including the authority to ensure that Amtrak may operate over tracks owned by other railroads, addressing disputes and setting the terms and conditions of shared use if Amtrak and railroads (or regional transportation authorities) fail to reach voluntary agreements.

Additionally, in Section 213 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), Congress gave STB the authority to investigate the reasons for persistent Amtrak train delays if either the On Time Performance (OTP) on a route dips below a certain level, or if specific metrics and standards, (to be developed jointly by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Amtrak), are not met.

SPRC members have long recognized that a high degree of reliable passenger train OTP is tantamount toward the growth and expansion of this essential transportation mode. Although it is written in law that "Amtrak has preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing" [49 U.S. Code § 24308(c)], intercity passenger rail (unfortunately) continues to suffer from freight rail interference delays. To return intercity passenger rail to pre-COVID ridership levels will require a safe environment and traveler assurances of on-time arrivals and departures.

With the November 16th issuance of the FRA's Final Rule on "Metrics and Minimum Standards for Intercity Passenger Rail Service" the STB's investigative authority under PRIIA Section 213 has been affirmed and validated. We envision that the STB will continue to fill its critical role in monitoring Amtrak's performance issues and has the authority to elicit positive change for the passenger rail customer through the hearing of cases that involves the statute's preference provision.

Finally, both freight and passenger rail have been well documented as energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable transportation modes. With the one-year extension of the FAST Act, we encourage Congress to take advantage of this additional time to consider further steps to advance rails' enhanced role in our Nation's environmental and transportation future.

Thank you for this opportunity and know that we stand ready to respond to any questions you may have or to elaborate further on our testimony, as you work through the development of long-term surface transportation authorization legislation.

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