

**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 March 9, 2021, for the record of the March 10, 2021 Hearing:
“Full Steam Ahead for Rail: Why Rail is More Relevant Than Ever for
Economic and Environmental Progress”**

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 appreciates this opportunity to provide comments as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee examines the role of rail, and specifically, intercity passenger rail, in support of our Nation’s economic and environmental recovery and progress. Intercity passenger rail serves the vital role of providing affordable mobility across the social and economic spectrum encompassing America’s rural and urban landscape. Additionally, passenger rail travel helps reduce energy consumption and pollution, including lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

SPRC members sponsor a combined 29 intercity passenger rail routes serving 296 communities across America. In the year leading up to the pandemic, 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. SPRC States are also intimately involved with intercity passenger rail services along Amtrak’s long-distance routes and the Northeast Corridor. 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 economic, health, safety, and environmentally beneficial aspects of traveling by passenger rail.

Economic Revitalization and Passenger Rail

The availability of easily accessible, safe, frequent, and reliable passenger rail has long been integral to America’s development and supporting commerce. In our Nation’s history, our cities and towns have grown and prospered due to the ability to move people efficiently. Intercity passenger rail has been an integral part of that growth. Many State-Supported routes and the NEC are essential to the business community in their regions and companies’ operations that

provide thousands of jobs. It is often the business community that is calling for increased frequencies or expanded routes. We also have seen across the country train stations with significant passenger activity spurring development nearby and influencing corporate locational decisions. Intercity passenger rail also plays a vital role in supporting businesses and workers transitioning to teleworking part-time in a post-pandemic economy. It enables workers, for example, to live in one city, telework from their homes part-time, and travel to their place of work in another city part-time. In such cases, passenger rail plays a pivotal role in avoiding congestion, tolls, parking, and driving time, and in enabling productive work while in route.

Furthermore, intercity passenger rail is just as essential to the citizens in rural and small urban communities served by the existing Amtrak long-distance routes as it is to our metropolitan centers. Intercity passenger rail enables these smaller communities to attract and retain businesses, jobs, and talent by connecting them with their regions' economic epicenters. Small businesses in many Amtrak-served rural communities rely on the business that an Amtrak station brings in and are eager to see service increased. Just as important is the tourism business facilitated by intercity passenger rail services.

As our Nation continues its economic recovery from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the passenger rail industry is prepared to aid in economic growth, for it is a powerful generator of jobs. More than 750 companies located in at least 39 states manufacture components for passenger and commuter rail. Over 200 of these companies in 32 states manufacture passenger rail cars, locomotives, or significant parts and their systems. Many of these manufacturers and suppliers have collaborated with the Next Generation Equipment Committee (NGEC), established by Congress in Section 305 of PRIIA. This collaboration has led to the development of standardized passenger rail equipment specifications that have lowered costs, revitalized domestic production, and invigorated the supply chain while creating high-wage jobs.

Additionally, the rail manufacturing supply chain and companies providing rail industry repair, maintenance, and re-manufacturing services are located in virtually every state and often in communities far from the rail systems themselves. Continued investment in intercity passenger rail is one of the critical forces in regional economic growth. The SPRC Member States and Regional Passenger Rail Authorities stand ready to serve as active partners with the business community in expanding our local and regional economies.

Environmental Benefits of Passenger Rail

Not only does passenger rail service support economic development it also helps reduce roadway congestion and lessens the toll on our environment. It is well documented that intercity passenger rail consumes significantly less energy per passenger mile and produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants than airplanes or motor vehicles. A single regional intercity passenger rail route with multiple daily roundtrips can divert tens of millions of pounds of CO₂ emissions annually in that region and save millions of gallons of fuel. Passenger rail will play an increasingly important role in meeting the demand for transporting people,

goods, and services while reducing environmental impacts and improving the overall quality of life.

One significant societal benefit from intercity passenger rail investment is the enhancement of air quality through the development and utilization of alternative fuels. One such alternative fuel is biodiesel. Biodiesel is a renewable, biodegradable fuel manufactured domestically from vegetable oils, animal fats, or recycled restaurant grease. SPRC Member organizations continue to study operating passenger locomotives on biodiesel fuel to demonstrate that they can work with no performance loss while improving air quality.

Thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on this crucial topic. We stand ready to respond to any questions you may have or elaborate on our testimony, especially as you continue drafting our Nation's next long-term surface transportation authorization legislation.

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