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Docket no: EP-726-0 Amtrak on-time definition

Comment:

Summary

On-time performance is critical to any successful transportation system, whether passenger railroad, airline, bus line, etc. At the very least, ten minutes should be the maximum allowance for trains to be behind schedule, at all stops, both intermediate and final.

Personal details and standing:

I ride Amtrak frequently, for both business and personal use. I live in Baltimore, and periodically ride Amtrak to Boston, Providence, Trenton, or Philadelphia for business. I have also used Amtrak for business trips to Chicago, and occasionally Atlanta, Raleigh, New Orleans, and Orlando. For personal travel, my wife and I ride to Philadelphia, Chicago, Lafayette, IN, Denver, Eugene, OR, and San Diego.

On-time performance:

The best transportation systems in the world are reliable and on-time. In some countries, governments have fallen when the trains are habitually late. Late trains cause passengers to miss important meetings, miss connecting trains and other transportation, and cause a great deal of inconvenience to the passengers and anyone waiting for them. Economically, delays reduce the productivity of everyone touched by the system: passengers, their businesses, Amtrak itself and its employees, cab drivers, and other station-related businesses. People will seek alternatives to unreliable systems (as they did the Empire Builder when it was habitually extremely late). Ten minutes is a reasonable window of delay that people can easily deal with.

On-time performance and U.S. Policy:

Why is on-time performance important? President Obama recently stated a goal of reducing our greenhouse emissions. The US DOT has similar sustainability statements and policies (see [www.transportation.gov](http://www.transportation.gov)). As an entity of DOT, STB is likewise required to follow those policies. Rail

travel emits approximately 40% less greenhouse gases than air travel, and approximately 37% less than auto travel. Transportation (all forms) is about 32% of US CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. If we could replace half of air travel, and half of auto travel with rail, then US CO<sub>2</sub> emissions could be cut by 5%, or more than 70 million metric tons per year (these are from 2009 DOT figures). Accordingly, promoting rail travel as a reliable and less-wasteful alternative is in keeping with the President's policy. If the trains are unreliable, people won't ride them, and STB will have lost an opportunity to be part of the solution. Clearly, there are other major factors to make rail a viable alternative (capacity, speed), but reliability is equally critical, and is "low hanging fruit" that STB has the opportunity to influence.