

Docket: EP-728

Implementing Intercity Passenger Train On-Time Performance and Preference Provisions

Russell Miller
11209 75 Avenue
Forest Hills, NY 11375
Email Address: russellgmiller@aol.com

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I use Amtrak for about one roundtrip each month, from New York to destinations all over the northeast and often beyond (e.g. Toronto, Chicago three times, Florida, and Seattle, all within the past year). Most of this travel is for business, and a substantial delay or missed connection can make the entire trip pointless. I missed half a day of a conference in Illinois last March due to a three-hour delay on train 29, and missed an entire day of work in New York when a six-hour delay in the west caused me to miss my evening eastbound connection in Chicago last January.

The train is useful as a way to combine several trips into one. As just one example, last October, en route to Chicago, I was able to stop and work for a day with a colleague in Ann Arbor, MI; had I flown, I would have gone directly to Chicago and skipped the meeting with her. Along the way on my trips, I can also often pay short visits to friends. (In 2015, such visits included Milwaukee, Washington DC, Buffalo, Rochester, and Schenectady, NY.)

The train also allows me to go directly to places which have, at best, small regional airports: I frequently visit South Bend, IN, Carbondale, IL, Gainesville, FL, and Greenville, NC, for example, all using the train (with Amtrak's bus connections to Gainesville and Greenville). For trips such as these, where no direct flight is available, the train reduces my carbon footprint very substantially, compared to two (or more) take-offs each way for air travel.

The nature of my work allows me to work on a train, or any quiet place where I can use a laptop, so a slower trip does not impede my productivity. However, reliability is essential: I cannot use the train if I have to cope with delays that may cause me to miss meetings or be stranded. If Amtrak's on-time performance reverts to the disastrous situation of a few years ago, I will simply have to reduce my travel, with consequent damage to my job performance. As long as the service is reliable, train travel is easier and far more congenial than other means of transportation, and I urge the STB to take all necessary steps to ensure that US freight railroads cooperate with Amtrak and keep our passenger trains on schedule.