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Marilyn Strickland

747 Market St  
Suite 1200  
Tacoma, WA 98402  
mayor@cityoftacoma.org

Mayor, City of Tacoma

I write to express opposition to the Surface Transportation Board Docket No. EP 728, Proposed Policy Statement on Implementing Intercity Passenger Train On-time Performance and Preference Provisions, and to request withdrawal of the statement. I am concerned the proposed statement gives host railroads the authority to give preference to freight service over passenger services. When Congress created Amtrak in the 1970s, it codified that passenger services be given preference over freight services.

Tacoma is a major transportation hub in the metropolitan Seattle-Tacoma region and is one of the most active stations on the Amtrak Cascades line. Our City has been invested with Amtrak and the Washington State Department of Transportation for some years in planning for the re-route of the Cascades service through our community in order to improve passenger service on-time performance rates. The Cascades service is highly valued by leisure and business travelers alike. We urge you not to compromise the local, State and federal collaboration that has advanced these highly anticipated service improvements by making changes in the way passenger service is managed - especially changes that are unnecessary.

Since the time Amtrak was established, host railroads have had the ability to petition the STB for relief from passenger service that materially lessens the quality of freight transportation. Yet, no host railroad has ever submitted a petition for relief. It is unnecessary to provide a policy statement clarifying how host railroads can receive relief, when not once has a host railroad requested such need.

STB should not rewrite federal law. Rather the agency should adhere to federal law and ensure that railroads continue to grant preference to Amtrak passenger trains operating on their tracks. When railroads identify a need for relief, use STB's review powers that have been granted to the agency.

Finally, as STB continues its work of analyzing delays on passenger rail routes, I join hundreds of other cities that are “in the middle” of these routes to urge you to measure on-time performance in our cities and not solely in the cities that are the origin and termination of the route. Our cities host thousands of passengers who’s destination may never be an originating or terminating city. These passengers deserve the same on-time service pledged to all passengers.