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Steve Vagnozzi
2144 Woodfield Rd
Okemos, MI 48864
517-349-4889

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My OTP Experience on Amtrak

Freight interference has been a regular occurrence on both my short and long distance Amtrak trips over the past 15 years. The vast majority of my trips would have been classified as late using the standards proposed by the Surface Transportation Board. An even bigger problem is that once it becomes unfeasible for a train to be on time at its final destination no further preference appears to be given to that train. I once had to quickly run between two platforms at Chicago Union Station to make my connecting train.

Why is OTP important?

Tourism is Michigan's third largest industry after manufacturing and agriculture with well over 3 million out-of-state visitors last year. Michigan's three Amtrak routes accounted for 777,463 riders last year. The state has been engaged for years in a long term effort to increase train speeds, improve ride quality and improve safety by installing Incremental Train Control System, a form of Positive Train Control. As these improvements have come on line, ridership has responded positively. OTP problems especially between Porter, IN & Chicago Union Station negatively impact ridership on the *Blue Water* (Port Huron-Chicago) train I travel most often. Most local communities along this route do not have scheduled air service, leaving Amtrak service as their only intercity public transportation option. The communities along the Blue Water route have made significant investments in their stations to handle the increasing number of passengers.

Examples:

- In East Lansing, home to Michigan State University, Amtrak moved to a new \$6.8 million intermodal station on 1/25/16. This move should eliminate the overcrowding that existed at the old station.
- Battle Creek has expanded its 1970's era station at a cost of \$3.6 million because it was getting overcrowded.
- Port Huron is also in the early stages of planning a new station because like the other stations, it is suffering from severe overcrowding.

There is a direct correlation between OTP and ridership. Amtrak's OTP and ridership records will bear out that ridership trends follow OTP trends by about 60-90 days. My daughter will no longer ride Amtrak because of the delays she frequently encountered while traveling to college in the Chicago area between 2006 & 2010.

Suggested OTP Standard

The STB's proposed mileage based OTP standard seems reasonable, but it needs to be applied at intermediate points not just the last station. Many intermediate stations have Amtrak Thruway (primarily bus) connections that need to be protected in the same manner as the final station.

There is the issue of passenger trains operating over more than one railroad. OTP needs to be separately measured for each host railroad. For example, the *Blue Water* operates for 159 miles from Port Huron to Battle Creek on Canadian National, then operates for 127 miles over State of Michigan and Amtrak-owned tracks to Porter, IN where it operates for 49 miles over Norfolk Southern into Chicago. The host railroads should be responsible for pro rata (< 1 minute late per 20 miles for the Blue Water) on-time delivery of the train to the next handover point.

The railroads have negotiated with Amtrak and have agreed to the schedules. Asking them to uphold their agreements does not seem to be an undue burden.