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TO: Surface Transportation Board
FROM: Ron Wolfe,
ATTN: Docket No. EP726

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I live in Dane County, WI, home of the state Capital City, Madison, and one of the nation's top research Universities. Madison lost its passenger rail service in 1971 when Amtrak relieved Chicago & North Western of passenger service responsibilities and scratched Madison off the national passenger rail system map. Due to access limitations my use of Amtrak is limited to long distance vacation travel, but if the service was more accessible I would prefer it to driving 80-250 miles to Milwaukee, Chicago, Minneapolis.

Due to the poor OTP of the one Amtrak train that passes through Wisconsin, the *Empire Builder (EB)* Madison cannot even attract a shuttle service to provide easy access to passenger rail service. As Amtrak's west bound *EB*, train #7, has little problem meeting scheduled arrival at the Columbus, WI station, a local bus company does offer one way service from Madison arriving in Columbus 2 hours ahead of the *EB* scheduled arrival. Anyone traveling to Madison or from Madison to meet the East bound train (#8), however must arrange their own transportation for the 37 mile trip between Columbus and Madison.

Reliable OTP would definitely improve Amtrak ridership. Perhaps the easiest way to assure OTP at Columbus would be to establish a 2nd, corridor train between Union Station Chicago and Minneapolis. As 1800 mi of the 2200 mi *EB* route is on a busy freight corridor owned by BNSF where it must compete with trains servicing mineral extraction industries, delays are beyond the control of Amtrak. Despite improvements made by BNSF, this region is subject to severe weather as well as variable volumes of freight traffic and occasional accidental blockage. If the train could be relied upon to be at the Columbus station within 10 minutes of its scheduled arrival, shuttle services could be feasibly established to facilitate access by close to ¾ million people in Dane, Rock and Jefferson counties.

A second train would not only improve OTP at all stops between Minneapolis and Chicago, it would also provide greater travel flexibility for intercity travel within the IL,WI,MN region. Adding this flexibility to reliable OTP would soon change attitudes toward passenger rail service and reduce any perceived need for highway expansion.

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