

240171

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
February 22, 2016
Part of
Public Record

EP -728

Implementing Intercity Passenger Train On-Time Performance and Preference Provisions

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The burden of proof that the passenger-priority agreement has been honored should rest on the host railroads. The host railroads control the number and extent of dispatching delays, so they should also bear the cost of their decision. That cost should not fall on Amtrak.

I am an Amtrak passenger. I often visit family in Rochester, NY, and I have traveled to conventions in Portland, OR; St. Louis, MO; Raleigh and Charlotte, NC; and Spartanburg, SC. On the way to and from these cities, the train is often delayed as we must wait for freight to pass. Some of my trips have been delayed four or five hours, usually in the form of multiple delays along the route.

Freight-related delays impose hardship on travelers and others. The diner runs out of edible food and the bathrooms malfunction. Many trains run just once daily, so if you miss your transfer in Chicago, it causes a cascade of complications. At the end of the trip, you miss your bus, or the rental counter has closed, or you must walk the city streets in the middle of the night instead of the expected bright afternoon. Arriving in Rochester, the train is often held up within just a few miles of the station, too late for family to alter their plans to pick me up.

Inasmuch as there are very few passenger trains, and yet they are very time sensitive, it would be appropriate to continue the railroads' original agreement to prioritize passenger service, an agreement they made when the government relieved them of the expense of operating that service.