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**Friends of the Cardinal
C/O John Charles Riecks
P.O. Box 7405
Charleston WV 25356**

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Phone: 304-545-4232

Friends of the Cardinal is an all-volunteer rail passenger group based in the Charleston WV area. Given our geographic location, Amtrak #50/51, the Cardinal, is our key to the entire nation-wide Amtrak system. People here board and connect for New England, the NE Corridor, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest and the Far West.

For the past eight years, our members have actively promoted Amtrak in general, and the Cardinal in particular, at "Ride Amtrak" displays at model rail shows, baseball games, and other events. Just during the past 12 months we have taken our display to Bluefield, Charleston (twice), Huntington, and Madison WV, Clifton Forge VA, and Athens OH, reaching a total of over 1,500 attendees.

But we have a problem. At our promotions, people keep asking the same question: "Why should I take a train that is always late?" What can we say, other than to sadly note that the Cardinal remains among the worst performers in the Amtrak System, being on time only 40% of the time in FY 2015.

We know that when Amtrak was formed, wording was included in *49 USC 24308 c (3) b* and *USC 24308 a (1)* which sought to insure that delays on Amtrak trains would be minimal. And subsequent legislation has attempted to provide a further legal framework for on-time passenger train operations. And yet, based on the public perceptions noted above, and upon our own personal experiences as passengers, these attempts have not been enough to provide decent on-time passenger rail service in our area.

Citizens in our part of West Virginia who rely on The Cardinal for transportation outside of our state only have access to that service three days a week (Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday). This schedule makes it even more difficult for those passengers trying to make connections to other trains if the Cardinal is severely behind its schedule. Further, when passengers on The Cardinal incur delays anywhere from 2 to 12 hours, this can cause additional travel costs for those passengers.

Part of Amtrak's mission is to provide travel services to ALL passengers including those with limited mobility issues, medical issues and the elderly. In West Virginia few interstate public transportation options are available for this segment of our population. Delayed trains, for many the only form of public transportation available, can cause extra hardship on their underlying medical conditions on occasion.

The entire state of West Virginia divided by mountains and rivers, is isolated and under-served by public transportation. One point of fairly dense population, the Eastern Panhandle, originates three commuter trains a day in cooperation with Maryland (MARC). The rest of West Virginia's passenger rail service, including that through Southern West Virginia, relies on the interstate rail network. Our organization realizes that no state agency or official in West Virginia can improve the On Time Performance of the Cardinal, if #50 is already 2 hours late when it crosses the Big Sandy River and enters our state. Therefore we in West Virginia need national action via the Surface Transportation Board.

We, citizens of West Virginia face tremendous economic change here. Coal, our state's long-time economic mainstay, is declining. West Virginia is striving to diversify, and many in the state now recognize that transportation, especially interstate public transportation including frequent on-time passenger rail service, holds a big key.

We believe that for many West Virginians the stakes are high. Our organization respectfully requests that the Surface Transportation Board fulfill its OTP mandate. We encourage the Board to adopt and implement the Proposed Rulemaking document (NPRM) and the Proposed Policy Statement (PPS). The definitions and policy guidance for passenger train On-Time Performance you propose in these documents appear to be a good, necessary, first step towards improving the On Time Performance on the entire Amtrak system, and especially on the Cardinal.

(This statement was adopted in an Open Meeting of the Friends of the Cardinal in Charleston WV on January 6.)

As attested by J. Charles Riecks, Co-Chair of the Friends of the Cardinal