



2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

AMTRAK & PASSENGER RAIL

ISSUE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports sufficient and sustained funding for the maintenance of the current service levels of Amtrak and passenger rail that will allow for capital improvements and prevent a reduction of service.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS

- Support the reauthorization of Amtrak with sufficient funding through 2012.
- Support nationwide passenger rail service.
- Establish a dependable funding mechanism that ensures continuing broad-based nationwide passenger rail service.
- Support cooperative agreements between Amtrak and commuter rail systems.
- Cease making a political issue of Amtrak funding in Transportation-HUD appropriations bill.
- Allow funding to be adhered to by appropriators upon reauthorization of Amtrak.
- Encourage economic development opportunities tied with Amtrak operations.
- Recognize and promote the environmentally-friendly and energy efficient benefits of Amtrak.
- Examine and denote Amtrak and nationwide passenger rail as a critical element for redundancy in emergency planning and evacuations.
- Recognize Amtrak and passenger rail's contributions to the U.S. economy.

BACKGROUND

The National Passenger Rail Corporation - better known as Amtrak - has provided the only intercity rail service in the United States since its creation in 1971. Passenger rail, like any mode of transportation, cannot be profitable without government subsidy. Amtrak has been operating without authorizing legislation since 2002. As a result, many important tasks cannot be undertaken, including: debt restructuring, high speed corridor studies, and research.

Amtrak is different from other modes of transportation because of what the subsidy supports. Amtrak receives funding for operation of rolling stock, along with capital improvements to stations and the limited trackage it owns. For aviation and roads, government provides subsidies in the form of free or low-cost infrastructure. Amtrak, and passenger rail in general, deserve the support of the Federal government.

Passenger rail is a critical component of our country's multi-modal transportation system. Amtrak provides a means of intercity transport for many populations and offers a viable alternative over taxed airlines and congested roadways. Further, Amtrak is the only intercity connection that many small and rural communities have. It serves 174 communities, mostly in rural areas, that are more than 75 miles from a large, medium, or small hub commercial airport, and 51 communities without intercity bus service. Passenger rail is also an extremely fuel efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transportation. This can help America achieve its goals in energy independence and improved environmental quality.

Since the late 1960's, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have directed the construction and maintenance of surface transportation infrastructure in urban areas with more than 50,000 people. MPOs and Councils of Government (COGs) perform comprehensive planning with substantial public input to support economic growth, environmental sustainability, and enhanced mobility for all. MPOs and COGs have a strong interest in maintaining a workable multi-modal transportation system to support regional planning and development initiatives.

Amtrak recently submitted a \$1.67 billion FY09 budget request to Congress that includes \$801 million for capital investments, \$525 million for operating expenses and \$345 million for debt service. Amtrak also identified a needed \$114 million congressional appropriation to fund the balance of retroactive pay to be given to workers in the coming fiscal year. In January, Amtrak reached labor agreements with nine unions that requires the railroad to provide pay retroactive from January 1, 2000. The railroad is seeking slightly more than its FY08 budget request of \$1.5 billion because of higher labor and health insurance costs, and fuel prices. In FY08, Amtrak received \$1.3 billion appropriation. The Bush Administration has proposed \$800 million for FY09.