

THE
NEW ENGLAND
COUNCIL

November 6, 2007

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the New England Council, I urge you to seize the momentum created by the recent Senate passage of S. 294, a six-year Amtrak reauthorization bill, and work with your colleagues to pass similar legislation in the near future. As you all know well, it is difficult to overstate the importance of safe, efficient, and comprehensive passenger rail to individuals, families, and businesses throughout New England, the entire East Coast, and the nation.

Travelers of all kinds face frustrating challenges these days. The high cost of gas makes driving a costly proposition in even the most fuel-efficient vehicles, and traffic jams, accidents, and construction can turn a seemingly predictable drive into a day-long headache. Airports up and down the East Coast are operating at near capacity, and minor mechanical glitches, bad weather, and overbooking (especially early in the day) can cause ripples in the aviation system that lead to seemingly endless waits in terminals and on tarmacs.

Amtrak continues to serve as a critical piece of the transportation puzzle in the Northeast Corridor, and its recent record-breaking ridership numbers reflect its importance. Last year, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC were in the top 8 of the busiest stations in the country in total ridership, and more than 1,700 trains daily operated over some portion of the northeast. This accounted for nearly 9.5 million passengers last year. Without Amtrak, these travelers would have found an alternative way to arrive at their destination, further choking already congested highways and runways, or even worse, forgoing the trip and negatively affecting our regional and national economy.

Long-term funding and strategizing for Amtrak has not been addressed by Congress since the rail system's current reauthorization expired in 2002, giving it no reasonable sense of security on a year-to-year basis. While the Council recognizes the appropriations process has funded Amtrak on an annual basis, and hopefully will continue to do so, S. 294 gives Amtrak the blueprint to begin improving its efficiency, service, and economic viability. It is nearly impossible for a business of any size to plan its future not having a reasonable sense of its overall financial position and Senate passage of S. 294 puts Amtrak one step closer to operating on a sound footing where it can undertake any multi-year changes it deems appropriate.

The New England Council is also asking for your support when Fiscal Year 2008 Amtrak funding comes before the House, possibly in the form of the 2008 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Conference Report. It is critical that Congress provide ample funding for the next 11 months to allow current service to continue while efforts to improve efficiency are undertaken.

Once again, I urge you to work with your colleagues to bring up and pass a long-term reauthorization that gives appropriators a multi-year blueprint to help Amtrak provide its vital service to millions of Americans. As always, please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Very Truly Yours,

Jim Brett
President & CEO