Amtrak Workers and Advocates Fight to Save Amtrak – From its own Management

Since assuming the role of Amtrak President and CEO on July 12th, 2017, Richard Anderson – formerly the head of Northwest Airlines and later Delta after the two companies merged – has made it apparent by his words and actions that he is an opponent of the Amtrak National Network and specifically the long-distance trains. Once former CEO Wick Moorman retired from his brief tenure at Amtrak at the end of 2017, Anderson moved into action. In the last year, he has downgraded service on many trains, has threatened to truncate some, and outright remove others from service. In the process, he has alienated rail workers at Amtrak and their unions, the travelling public and the various rail advocacy groups, railroad retirees, private car owners, countless mayors of towns and cities across the country, and public officials, Republican and Democrat alike. The New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers has called for his resignation in a letter to Amtrak Board Chairman Anthony Coscia July 10th, just shy of his one-year anniversary date as CEO of the company.

While some rail advocacy and worker organizations were at first willing to “give him a chance”, there is now a consensus building that he is the wrong man to lead Amtrak. In the past nine months months at the helm, the new CEO – much to the chagrin of passengers, advocates, workers and elected officials alike – has done the following:

- Removed the popular Parlor Cars and first-class dining from the Coast Starlight, Amtrak's most popular long-distance train between LA and Seattle.
- Removed hot meal and sit-down dining car service from the Capitol Limited and the Lake Shore Limited between Chicago and east coast cities.
- Closed numerous stations and eliminated baggage service from towns across the country, leaving some states like Kansas and West Virginia with NO staffed stations at all.
- Continues to threaten to truncate The Chief and substitute bus service in Kansas and New Mexico, despite an earlier agreement that Amtrak was party to with BNSF and the states, and despite overwhelming political opposition to this move.
- Refused to handle private car moves or operate or support special trains that have generated income for decades.
- Eliminated seasonal equipment additions on certain trains and then claimed those trains were suffering reduced ridership and poor financial performance.
- Eliminated the popular student and senior discounts systemwide.
- Threatened to remove eight routings and their trains, citing the lack of Positive Train Control (PTC), despite federal exemptions of these routings from the PTC mandate.
- Promoted a flawed accounting system that casts the long-distance trains in a bad light, blaming them for Amtrak’s financial woes, while downplaying the substantial expenses the company incurs from its operation of the Northeast Corridor (NEC).

Ironically, all of this comes at a time when Amtrak is enjoying broad public support and the support of elected officials from both parties. Despite President Trump’s opposition to the National Network, Congressional Republicans have joined with Democrats to provide a decent level of Amtrak funding the past two years that would actually allow the company to expand service rather than reduce it. And as we go to press, in a rebuke to Anderson, the Senate overwhelmingly adopted an amendment to keep The Chief and its route intact. As we go to press, the corporation has pledged to keep the chief running for at least another year.

Workers, passengers and communities are fighting back. Over the summer, Amtrak employees, members of three separate unions, came together to rally in Washington DC in defense of full dining service on long distance trains. Elected officials in West Virginia have sponsored legislation to mandate at least one staffed station be available in every state. And advocacy groups are either calling for Anderson’s resignation or issuing scathing attacks upon his skewed accounting schemes, lack of transparency, and arrogant and condescending attitude when questioned by members of the public. Even former Amtrak President and CEO Joe Boardman has issued a blistering open letter to public officials in response to all of this, flatly stating that Anderson’s antics endanger the sustainability of the national network.

Railroad Workers United takes this situation very seriously and encourages all railroad workers and our allies to fight back.