



**AmeriStarRail**

*Transportation Innovation*

June 20, 2023

Honorable Troy E. Nehls - Chairman  
Honorable Donald M. Payne, Jr. - Ranking Member  
U.S. House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials  
2165 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Nehls and Ranking Member Payne,

AmeriStarRail (ASR) has developed a private sector initiative to improve Amtrak's Northeast Corridor and Empire Corridor services, without the use of additional government funding. This is achieved with expanded high speed, higher frequency, high performance service as detailed on our website [www.AmeriStarRail.com](http://www.AmeriStarRail.com).

I respectfully submit the attached statement to the committee, for the record, regarding the June 6th hearing on Amtrak Operations: Examining the Challenges and Opportunities for Efficiency and Service.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Spencer  
Chief Operating Officer



**Statement of Scott R. Spencer**  
**Chief Operating Officer**  
**AmeriStarRail LLC**  
**Prepared for**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials**  
**Regarding Amtrak Operations:**  
**Examining the Challenges and Opportunities for Efficiency and Service**  
**Tuesday, June 20, 2023**

Dear Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Payne and Members of the Subcommittee,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the subcommittee with this statement regarding the private sector proposal of AmeriStarRail to partner with Amtrak to help improve safety, service, ridership, revenues and reliability on the Northeast Corridor without the use of additional government funds.

AmeriStarRail ([www.AmeriStarRail.com](http://www.AmeriStarRail.com)) is a private sector company, planning the most dramatic transformation of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service since America's first high speed trains, *The Metroliners*, in 1969.

In this partnership, AmeriStarRail is proposing to privately finance, operate and maintain a fleet of high-speed trains, branded as Amtrak trains using union employees in the same way private airlines operate connecting United Airlines and American Airlines flights as affiliated carriers. As a valuable public asset, the Northeast Corridor infrastructure will still be owned, controlled and maintained by Amtrak with continued support by Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Under this transformative business model, based only on the costs "above the rail", AmeriStarRail will pay Amtrak hundreds of millions of dollars annually in user fees and monthly performance incentives to use its tracks and stations.

Key to this transformation is implementing innovation in four key areas: service, marketing, technology and the organization. Most of these innovative solutions were devised to help Amtrak confront a number of challenges and create opportunities to improve efficiency and service.

Multiple challenges that Amtrak faces on the Northeast Corridor include:

- Low market share among all rail, car, bus and air trips
- Poor utilization of the federal investment in high-speed rail
- Most of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) trains (Amfleet) are nearly 50 years old
- NEC congestion contributes to poor on-time performance
- High speed track standards are not maintained as rigorously as those in Europe and Asia
- Unsecured right-of-way is a major factor in train delays due to trespassers deaths and debris collisions on the Northeast Corridor



## **Amtrak's Low Market Share for All Trip Modes on the Northeast Corridor**

AmeriStarRail and our private investors believe that one of the greatest challenges facing Amtrak is its low market share of rail, car, bus and air trips after over 50 years of operation on the Northeast Corridor. According to 2019 and 2022 data from the National Household Travel Survey, conducted annually by the Federal Highway Administration, Amtrak has only a single digit marketshare of all rail, car, bus and air Northeast Corridor intercity trips. For some city pairs Amtrak's marketshare is just 3%. These results indicate Amtrak significantly underperforms its market potential to reduce energy consumption, pollution and traffic/airport congestion.

To confront this challenge and significantly improve ridership and Amtrak's marketshare, AmeriStarRail is proposing a partnership with Amtrak to implement the following private sector initiatives, vision and innovation:

1. Eliminate costly, time consuming terminal operations at New York, Philadelphia and Washington.
2. Operate more frequent service, including hourly nonstops, at higher speeds up to 160 mph with a standard high-speed trainset fleet offering food service and Triple-Class service for Coach, Business and First Class passengers on every Northeast Corridor train.
3. Operation of a standard high-speed fleet will improve on-time performance, reliability and dramatically reduce trainset maintenance costs with the centralized efficiency of the Northeast Corridor's first Trainset Maintenance Center (TMC).
4. Extend direct Amtrak Northeast Corridor service to over 30 new stations including Amtrak trains serving stations in Center City Philadelphia, Hoboken Terminal and Long Island.

## **Poor Utilization of the Federal Investment in High-Speed Rail**

According to Amtrak's ridership reports, although Amtrak carried 12.5 million passengers on the Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington in 2019, less than 30%, or only 3.6 million passengers could afford to ride on high-speed Acela trains. AmeriStarRail's solution, offering Triple-Class service of Coach, Business and First Class on a standardized Northeast Corridor fleet of 160 mph high-speed trains means 100% of Amtrak passengers and 100% of Amtrak trains will utilize the federal investment in the high-speed rail infrastructure from Boston to Washington.

Amtrak's current \$7.3 billion plan to buy slower trains for Northeast Corridor coach passengers from Siemens would still go forward but these trainsets can be reassigned to Amtrak's new routes nationwide.

All high-speed trains in Europe and Asia serve Coach passengers. All airlines offering First Class and Business Class seating also serve Coach passengers on the same aircraft on every flight. AmeriStarRail wants to implement a privately funded solution that will allow Amtrak to improve utilization of its high-speed rail investments. Our goal is for Amtrak conductors to announce "All Aboard" Amtrak's fastest trains for all passengers.

## **Most of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) Trains (Amfleet) are Nearly 50 years Old**

On January 4, 2023, AmeriStarRail's Senior Advisor, Paul Reistrup (former President of Amtrak) sent a letter to Federal Railroad Administrator Amit Bose expressing safety concerns for continuing to operate the aging Amfleet cars at speeds up to 125 mph on the Northeast Corridor since "no rail passenger service in North American railroad history has operated passenger train



cars so old, so fast.” AmeriStarRail’s privately funded solution, if implemented, will begin to replace the Amfleet cars next year and replace all of these cars before they turn 50 years old in 2025. Amtrak’s current plan will not replace all of the Amfleet until sometime after the Year 2030.

AmeriStarRail is proposing to replace the Amfleet cars with an additional order of the Alstom Avelia Liberty trainsets, currently being built in Hornell, NY, to offer “Triple-Class service” for Coach, Business and First Class passengers on every Northeast Corridor train. This is the fastest way to replace the Amfleet cars with trainsets that are equipped with safety features that do not exist on the Amfleet cars.

Although Amfleet cars, built in the 1970s, meet grandfathered FRA safety requirements, they do not have the structural materials, safety features, technology and crash energy management systems found in the current Acela fleet or the next generation Alstom built Acela fleet. In case of an emergency, Amfleet windows are too small for first responders to evacuate injured passengers on stretchers. AmeriStarRail believes the safest course of action is to remove the Amfleet cars from high-speed Northeast Corridor service as soon as possible and replace them with newer, safer trainsets.

### **NEC Congestion Contributes to Poor On-Time Performance**

AmeriStarRail’s plans to eliminate terminal operations at Washington, Philadelphia and New York City will significantly reduce Northeast Corridor station congestion. Operation of a standardized fleet of 160 mph high-speed trainsets will also allow synchronization of operating speeds of all Northeast Corridor Amtrak trains for the first time in Amtrak’s history. This will reduce the operating costs and inefficiencies of train overtakes, congestion, delays and dispatching complexities, and improve Northeast Corridor capacity. NEC on-time performance in recent years has averaged less than 85%.

There are also a number of opportunities to reduce and eliminate conflicts and congestion with freight trains along the corridor to improve on-time performance.

### **Amtrak’s NEC High-Speed Track Standards are not Maintained as Rigorously as Those in Europe and Asia**

The tracks on the Northeast Corridor are not maintained to the more rigorous and precise standards of high-speed tracks in Europe and Asia. This is a key reason for the delay in completing the testing and certification of the new Alstom Acela trainsets which are not expected to enter service until sometime in 2024.

Although Amtrak conducts regular track inspections, at frequent intervals throughout the year, the world class standard of daily track inspections requires a special inspection train that conducts measurements of track defects and variations in the precise track geometry required to maintain safe and smooth train operations at high speeds. Around the world these dedicated inspection trains are known as “doctor trains” and conduct inspections of both the track and catenary at top speeds up to 220 mph. Amtrak, to date, has not utilized this readily-available technology to maintain the Northeast Corridor.



With the use of private financing, AmeriStarRail will provide Amtrak with access, for the first time, to a dedicated “doctor train” that will be a critical tool for improving and maintaining the highest track standards on the Northeast Corridor to improve safety, ride quality and service reliability. This high-speed inspection train will be a new Alstom Avelia Liberty trainset, built without passenger seating, equipped with track and catenary inspection systems designed to perform daily inspections at speeds up to 160 mph.

Deconflicting and reducing the operation of freight trains on tracks dedicated for high-speed operations will also be essential to maintaining precise track standards for high-speed trains.

**Unsecured Right-of-Way is a Major Factor in Train Delays Due to Trespassers Deaths and Debris Collisions on the Northeast Corridor**

Some of the most significant train delays on the Northeast Corridors are the result of service being stopped for several hours due to the tragic accidental or suicide death of a trespasser on the tracks. Other service disruptions are the result of trains colliding with debris such as water heaters, bicycles, tires, shopping carts and other debris which are dumped along the tracks in major cities along the Northeast Corridor.

Unsecured right-of-way has existed since the Northeast Corridor route was built in the 19th Century. With trains operating at speeds up to 160 mph in the 21st Century this poses an unacceptable risk to safety and service reliability.

In the airline industry it would be unacceptable to operate unsecured airports with people crossing runways as a shortcut between neighborhoods or planes striking debris on the runway due to illegal dumping. Just as airport perimeters are fenced in and interstate highways have fencing to deter trespassing, AmeriStarRail is proposing that the multi-billion dollar investment in improving the Northeast Corridor also include a project to seal the corridor to prevent trespassers and illegal dumping of debris from disrupting train operations. This innovative safety project will include right-of-way fencing and walls and setback platform screens on Amtrak and commuter rail station platforms as is used to seal high-speed rail corridors in Japan and other countries.

We at AmeriStarRail look forward to having an opportunity to partner with Amtrak and work with Congress to implement our proposed solutions to confront Amtrak’s challenges and create opportunities to improve its efficiency and service.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Spencer  
Chief Operating Officer