April 24, 2018

Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Commissioner,

It has come to our attention that Amtrak is planning several initiatives which will negatively affect our members and the traveling Florida public, some of whom are likely to be your constituents. These moves, coming as existing service levels are at an all-time low and after dining service was removed from one of the two daily trains serving the state, will further degrade service.

Amtrak said in a press release that it will change its menu June 1 and offer the following cold foods only. No hot food will be offered to sleeping car passengers who pay a premium fare to ride overnight. Instead they will only get box lunches. Brand new dining cars arriving from the factory will only be used as a de facto lounge for first class passengers. No meals will be prepared on board and no table service will be provided. This will drive passengers away

We believe a part of the reason for this is that Amtrak is required to break even on its food and beverage service under the FAST Act and that Amtrak’s current president comes from the airline industry, a completely different form of transportation. Peanuts suffice on a two-hour flight, but not on an overnight train trip, where dining service is a draw for sleeper class service.

Another initiative Amtrak is considering is to reduce service on certain national network overnight trains to less than daily service by expanding shorter segments with more than one round trip daily. This is an attempt to curtail the long distance service which holds the national system together. ALL trains serving Florida are long distance trains.

Finally, we oppose Amtrak's policy of curtailing private charter services and limiting private cars, both of which have shown to be revenue generators.

**Railway Age Editor-in-Chief William Vantuono said these changes**, among others, could be “a veiled attempt to drive passengers away” in support of rumored “internal plans within Amtrak to discontinue long-distance trains” and focus on short- and medium-distance services in the NEC, Midwest (Chicago) and California, as well as state-supported trains. We agree.

We ask that you oppose these moves and support added service and new equipment. A part of the problem is that we need to decide whether Amtrak is to be operated as a for profit business or a government agency. We believe that while it should be operated in a fiscally prudent manner, service to the public must come first. The FAST Act should be amended to remove the requirement that food service break even and Amtrak must become a truly national system.

Sincerely,

Stephen Sayles
Florida Coalition of Rail Passengers
Council Rep Rail Passenger Assoc.