

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 21, 2017

Mr. Charles Moorman & Mr. Richard Anderson
Co-CEOs, Amtrak
60 Massachusetts Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Moorman and Mr. Anderson:

We were deeply saddened to learn of the tragic Amtrak derailment in Washington this week that left at least three people dead and about 100 others injured. While the official cause of this week's crash is still being investigated, we write to ask Amtrak to provide the Illinois congressional delegation with an update on its ongoing efforts to implement positive train control (PTC) safety technology in Illinois by the 2018 statutory deadline.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has confirmed that Amtrak Train No. 501 was traveling at a speed more than double the posted limit before it derailed. Given that the train's excessive speed likely played a role in its derailment, it's possible that the fatal rail accident could have been avoided had PTC been in operation along those tracks. PTC is a congressionally mandated safety system that uses technology to slow or stop speeding trains, preventing collisions and overriding human errors, but Amtrak reported that while PTC was installed on the rail segment where the crash occurred, it was still being tested and not yet operational.

PTC would have also prevented the 2015 Amtrak derailment outside of Philadelphia that occurred when an Amtrak train similarly accelerated to more than twice the speed limit as it entered a curve, killing eight people and injuring nearly 200 others. Implementing PTC is vitally important to ensuring that Amtrak provides the utmost level of safety for the millions of riders in Illinois and around the country who depend on Amtrak to travel and get to work every day. However, we understand the high costs and technological challenges that passenger railroads have faced in developing and deploying this new technology. While Amtrak operates 56 trains per day in Illinois alone, implementing PTC in Illinois is complicated by the fact that Amtrak's trains operate on tracks not owned by Amtrak. Ensuring PTC works safely in Illinois requires system interoperability and cooperation between Amtrak, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Metra, and the freight railroads that operate on or own track in the state. Challenges with interoperability is one of the reasons why Congress moved to extend the implementation deadline.

More can and should be done to assist passenger railroads in implementing PTC, and we stand ready to work with you to make sure more opportunities and resources are available to achieve the highest level of safety for Amtrak travelers and workers. In the meantime, we request that you report back to the Illinois congressional delegation on Amtrak's current progress on implementing PTC in Illinois, the costs and challenges associated with implementation, and Amtrak's timeline for PTC installation and operation on all Illinois routes.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator