

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

October 22, 2019

Mr. Ronald Batory, Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Batory:

I am writing to you following the recent publication of the Amtrak Office of the Inspector General (OIG)'s report titled "Better Estimates Needed of the Financial Impacts of Poor On-Time Performance." I want to continue a longstanding and crucial discourse on the negative effects of on-time performance (OTP) on Illinois Amtrak riders—particularly along the Chicago-to-Carbondale *Illini/Saluki* route—at the hand of freight railroads.

I offered an amendment requesting this OIG report on the Senate Floor during last year's appropriations process, which passed unanimously, so that we could better understand the impact of poor OTP on Amtrak's operations, and further, to understand how to improve this issue for Amtrak's ridership.

The report again highlights the dismal OTP along the *Illini/Saluki* route in particular, citing OTP as low as six percent for Northbound *Illini* trains and 17 percent for Northbound *Saluki* trains during Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. This is a stark decline from an already-low 29 percent OTP on this route as of FY 2017. Further, the report details how poor OTP leads Amtrak to pay financial penalties for crew staffing violations—and that out of the 1,329 penalties for late trains in FY 2018, 811 of these penalties were paid to engineers on the *Illini/Saluki* route.

Unacceptable OTP not only harms Amtrak's passengers and its reputation, it is a key factor driving Amtrak's operating loss of \$171 million during FY 2018.

As you are well aware, freight railroads continue to ignore their statutory obligation to provide Amtrak with preference on their tracks. As a result, freight interference has hampered Amtrak's financial stability as well as reliability for riders—and it caused roughly 60 percent of Amtrak's delays in FY2018. I have consistently taken an active role in holding Canadian National, which owns much of the track along Illinois routes, accountable for repeated freight interference and speed restrictions that have plagued the *Illini/Saluki* route with some of the worst OTP in the country.

Further, I have regularly raised the issue of freight interference with you during our meetings, calling on the Federal Railroad Administration to take a more active role in ensuring improvements to Amtrak's OTP, particularly along its Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale routes.

As a firm supporter of passenger rail, I stand ready to continue working with Amtrak, as well as with the FRA to push CN, to improve Amtrak's reliability for Illinois riders. The people of Illinois deserve better—they deserve assurance that they can arrive at their destination in not only a safe but a timely manner. I look forward to working with you to advance Amtrak's Illinois performance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator