

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

May 10, 2018

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

Dear Administrator Batory,

I write to convey the ongoing frustration of my constituents in Illinois over the persistently low on-time performance of Amtrak's Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route, which operates on tracks owned and operated by Canadian National Railway (CN), and I urge the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to take a more active role in working with the freight railroads to ensure Amtrak's on-time performance improves in Illinois and around the country.

Amtrak's Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route has the worst on-time performance of any state supported route in the country. The Illini and Saluki trains are consistently delayed by CN's freight interference and the ongoing speed restrictions put in place by CN in 2015. Last year, trains on that route arrived on time only 32 percent of the time. That's simply unacceptable and deserves the FRA's immediate attention and action.

Current speed restrictions along 83 percent of the 304-mile Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route were put in 2015 as a safety precaution following repeated mechanical issues on the route, but since then, little progress has been made by CN and Amtrak towards an agreeable solution that will finally solve the underlying issue and lift the current speed limit. My constituents have waited long enough while the Amtrak service they rely on has suffered. It's time for the FRA to take on a larger oversight role in the ongoing dispute between Amtrak and CN, and I urge you to begin convening regular meetings between the leadership at FRA, CN, and Amtrak that include my staff so the FRA can set deadlines, prevent further delays, and ensure greater accountability.

But while the current speed restrictions certainly impact on-time performance, they are only partly to blame for the route's poor on-time performance. Freight interference continues to be the main driver of passenger rail delays on this route and routes across the country. Canadian National in particular has a long history of holding up Amtrak trains and holding back investments that could improve passenger and freight service in downstate Illinois. The FRA must do more to improve Amtrak on-time performance by practicing rigorous oversight of railroads who fail to live up to their obligations under the law.

Reliable, safe and on-time rail service is vital to the Illinois economy. I believe you can help improve Amtrak's on-time performance issues significantly by increasing the FRA's oversight of the freight railroads.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator