



NEWS RELEASE

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Broad Coalition and Members of Congress Hold Rally for Passenger Rail at U.S. Capitol

Diverse, Bipartisan Gathering Urges Congress to Fully Fund Passenger Rail System in 2003 and Beyond

Washington, DC – In a high-energy “Rally for Rail” and meetings with members of Congress today, hundreds of citizens from across the country are urging Congress to support passenger rail as an integral part of our nation’s transportation system and to provide full funding for Amtrak in 2003 and beyond.

Participants in the “Rally for Rail” represent many businesses, labor unions, and state and local governments, as well as millions of consumers and citizens across America. More than 50 groups (see attachment) have endorsed resolutions calling on Congress to fully fund Amtrak in 2003, and to enact a reauthorization bill that ensures a strong, long-term future for the nation’s passenger rail system.

“Today’s event demonstrates that people from all across America and across the political spectrum want a stronger passenger rail system in this country,” said Mayor Kenneth Barr, chairman of the Transportation and Communications Committee of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. “We are all united in the conviction that it’s time to put Amtrak on a more stable foundation for the future, and to have it play a growing role in our country’s congested transportation system.”

Just this week, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties, the National Conference of State Legislatures and three other national organizations representing local governments sent a letter to House and Senate leaders urging them to appropriate \$1.2 billion for Amtrak in FY ’03 to prevent the elimination of train services.

“State legislatures believe that developing a stronger passenger rail system provides us with opportunities to reduce traffic congestion and to diversify the nation’s transportation system, while contributing to economic growth and an improved environment,” said Del. Brent Boggs of the West Virginia House of Delegates, representing the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Among those addressing the 9 a.m. pep rally are Senators Joe Biden (D-DE), Tom Carper (D-DE), and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX); Reps. Jack Quinn (R-NY), James Oberstar (D-MN), and Bob Clement (D-TN); Mayors Kenneth Barr of Ft. Worth, TX and Patrick Henry Hays of North Little Rock, AR, representing the US Conference of Mayors; Rhea Huddleston, Wapello County Board of Supervisors, Ottumwa, Iowa, representing

the National Association of Counties; George Dorshimer of LTK Engineering Services of Ambler, PA, representing the business community through the American Passenger Rail Coalition; Mac Fleming, international president of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; and Debbie Sease, legislative director of the Sierra Club. The rally is also being enlivened by a performance by the award-winning Hines Junior High School Marching Band of Washington, DC.

Later in the day, Rally participants will fan out on Capitol Hill to meet with more than 45 key members of Congress.

Congress created Amtrak in 1971 to take over unprofitable passenger rail lines from the private sector. But unlike aviation, highways and other modes of transportation, Congress has given passenger rail no dedicated source of funding. Instead, it must rely on the unpredictable annual appropriations process, which has provided only about 50% of the authorized funding levels in recent years.

To improve its financial position, Amtrak has found ways to boost revenues by nearly 40% over the last five years, leverage valuable assets, borrow funds from private banks, and cut back on operating and capital spending without compromising safety, reliability or service. But these efforts haven't been enough to offset the basic problems of conflicting policy mandates and inadequate public funding. Without adequate funds in 2003, Amtrak has told Congress and state leaders it may have to discontinue much of the national network as early as this autumn.

"Investing in our national Amtrak passenger rail system has never been more important," said George Dorshimer, President of LTK Engineering Services of Ambler, PA and board member of the American Passenger Rail Coalition. "Investments in rail service produce substantial economic, mobility and environmental benefits for the nation and communities across America."

"It's ironic we're in this situation because Amtrak is performing so well in the market," said Alan Yorker of Decatur, Georgia, president of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. "The growing demand for Amtrak's services is a reflection of the fact that rail is an attractive option for many business and leisure travelers, it's cost-effective for state and local governments, it's a contributor to job creation and economic development, and it's good for the environment and energy independence."

"The need for the service is there, along with strong support from the traveling public, state and local governments, and all of these groups here today," Sonny Hall, president of the Transport Workers Union of America and president of the Transportation Trades Dept. of the AFL-CIO. "What Amtrak needs most now is a steady, strong partner in the federal government – a partner it doesn't have today."

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Media information:

The rally will take place in the Upper Senate Park at the corner of Constitution and Delaware Avenues, just west of the Russell Senate Office Building. In case of rain, the event will move to the Hart Senate Office Building, Room 216.

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