

FY2010 Omnibus Appropriations Conference Agreement

NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION (AMTRAK)

The conference agreement provides a total of **\$1,564,625,000** for the operations, capital improvements and debt service to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak).

OPERATING GRANTS TO THE NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION

The conference agreement provides **\$563,000,000** in operating grants to Amtrak instead of **\$553,348,000** as proposed by the House and the Senate. Such funds are available until expended, as proposed by the Senate.

OIG savings reports.-The conference agreement modifies the House and Senate bills and requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) IG to provide semiannual reports to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on the estimated savings accrued as a result of all operation reforms instituted by Amtrak as well as any possibilities for future savings .

Business plan.-The conference agreement modifies language included in the House and Senate bills and requires Amtrak to provide semiannual reports in electronic format regarding the pending business plan as well as progress against the milestones and target dates contained in its financial performance improvement plan provided in fiscal year 2009.

Reduced fares.-The conference agreement directs Amtrak to report semi-annually on fares reduced by fifty percent or more from the normal, peak fare rather than quarterly as proposed by the House.

Human emulation technology.-The conference agreement provides **\$3,000,000** for Amtrak to deploy and study the use of human emulation technology rather than **\$5,000,000** as was proposed by the Senate. The House did not provide funding for this purpose.

The following article will help you understand what this technology is being used for in the Transportation Industry.

Continental Airlines has introduced a virtual expert named Alex on its website. The new offering provides customers 24-hour support on the web for all their travel needs.

Alex interacts with customers to easily and effectively interpret requests and provide accurate answers to travel needs. Continental says it is the first network carrier to offer human emulation technology.

Customers visiting continental.com can click the Alex icon to open a chat window where they can enter a question. Alex responds with both a written and spoken response. The

customer is then automatically navigated to the specific place on continental.com that answers the question and provides other helpful links in the chat window.

Developed by Next IT, the new technology emulates not only the look and voice of a human, but also the ability to understand the intent of phrases and dialog, guiding customers to information and making continental.com a one-stop shop for travel planning and information.

The airline added that Alex allows Continental to provide the same high-touch service available within the call centre environment for customers on the web.

Prior to launching the technology, Continental tested the product with 3,000 of the airline's most frequent flyers and with reservations agents at Continental's call centre in Salt Lake City.

Reservations agents at Continental are using the Virtual Expert technology to answer customer questions and improve the customer experience during calls.

CAPITAL AND DEBT SERVICE GRANTS TO THE NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION

The conference agreement provides **\$1,001,625,000** for capital and debt service payment grants to Amtrak as proposed by the Senate, instead of \$929,625,000 as proposed by the House. Such funds are available until expended, as proposed by the Senate. Within the funds provided, the conference agreement includes **\$264,000,000** for Amtrak's debt service payment as proposed by the House and the Senate. The agreement modifies the Senate bill and requires that grants made after the first \$200,000,000 be provided only on a reimbursable basis.

Americans with Disabilities Act.-Under its six-year plan for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Amtrak would invest **\$ 144,000,000** during fiscal year 2010 for necessary capital investments. The conferees direct Amtrak to maintain this plan for complying with the requirements of ADA. The conferees also direct Amtrak to provide quarterly status reports on its ADA improvements and progress on the six-year plan.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS-FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

Section 151 retains a provision that permits FRA to purchase promotional items for Operation Lifesaver as proposed by the House and Senate.

Section 152 retains a provision that ceases the availability of Amtrak funds if the railroad contracts for services outside the United States for any service performed by a full-time or part-time Amtrak employee as of July 1, 2006 as proposed by the House and Senate.

Section 153 retains a provision that allows FRA to receive and use cash or spare parts to repair, and replace damaged track inspection cars as proposed by the House and Senate.

Section 154 requires the FRA Administrator to submit quarterly reports to the Committees on Appropriations on Amtrak on-time performance as proposed by the House and Senate.

Section 155 clarifies funding for a project in California provided in the FY 2009 **Appropriations Act, as proposed by the House.**

Section 156 clarifies funding for a project in New York provided in the FY 2008 Appropriations Act, as proposed by the Senate.

Section 157 clarifies funding for a project in Washington provided in the FY 2009 Appropriations Act as proposed by the Senate.

Section 158 modifies language for a railroad feasibility study in Springfield, II.... proposed by the Senate.

Wicker Amendment – Carrying Firearms in Checked Baggage on Amtrak the highlighted section is the change made in conference.

SEC.159. (a) AMTRAK SECURITY EVALUATION.—No later than 180 days after the enactment of this Act, Amtrak, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security (Transportation Security Administration), shall submit a report to Congress that contains—

- (1) a comprehensive, system-wide, security evaluation; and
- (2) proposed guidance and procedures necessary to implement a new checked firearms program.

(b) DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the enactment of this Act, Amtrak, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary, shall develop and implement guidance and procedures to carry out the duties and responsibilities of firearm storage and carriage in checked baggage cars and at Amtrak stations that accept checked baggage.

(2) SCOPE. —The guidance and procedures developed under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) permit Amtrak passengers holding a ticket for a specific Amtrak route to place an unloaded firearm or starter pistol in a checked bag on such route if —

- (i) the Amtrak station accepts checked baggage for such route;
- (ii) the passenger declares to Amtrak, either orally or in writing, at the time the reservation is made or not later than 24 hours before departure, that the firearm will be placed in his or her bag and will be unloaded;
- (iii) the firearm is in a hard-sided container;
- (iv) such container is locked; and
- (v) only the passenger has the key or combination for such container;

(B) permit Amtrak passengers holding a ticket for a specific Amtrak route to place small arms ammunition for personal use in a checked bag on such route if the ammunition is securely packed—

- (i) in fiber, wood, or metal boxes; or
- (ii) in other packaging specifically designed to carry small amounts of ammunition; and

(C) include any other measures needed to ensure the safety and security of Amtrak employees, passengers, and infrastructure, including—

- (i) requiring inspections of any container that carries a firearm or ammunition; and
- (ii) the temporary suspension of firearm carriage service if credible intelligence information indicates a threat related to the national rail system or specific routes or trains.

(c) DEFINITIONS.—

(1) For purposes of this section, the term "checked baggage" refers to baggage transported that is accessible only to select Amtrak employees.