

Scardelletti to Congress - Don't Privatize Amtrak's Northeast Corridor



Bob Scardelletti

TCU President Bob Scardelletti testified January 27th at a special hearing of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I). The hearing was held at Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

The hearing was called by new T&I Chairman John Mica (R-FL), a long-time fierce critic of Amtrak. As a result of the November elections, Mica replaced one of Amtrak's staunchest supporters, Jim Oberstar (D-MN).

Any pretense of fairness was belied by the hearing's title: "Developing True High-Speed Rail to the Northeast Corridor: Stop Sitting on Our Federal Assets." Amtrak was not even allowed on the panel.

However, reflecting rail labor's continuing clout, TCU President Scardelletti was called

as the lone defender of Amtrak's role on the Corridor. He was not deterred by the odds. In clear and decisive remarks, Scardelletti stood up for Amtrak workers and the rock-solid, middle-class jobs they hold. At every turn, Scardelletti defended the Amtrak system from a barrage of comments to privatize the Corridor and stop funding for Amtrak.

In his testimony, Scardelletti praised the efforts of all workers on the Northeast Corridor. "I want to acknowledge the thousands of rail workers in all crafts who work throughout the Northeast Corridor providing safe and reliable service to hundreds of thousands of riders every day. Many are working right here in Grand Central Terminal and just a few blocks down the street at Penn Station."

Maintain Funding

His testimony highlighted the need for long-term federal funding in order to maintain the future of high-speed rail.

"A viable intercity passenger rail system that includes high-speed rail can only be achieved through annual appropriations by Congress," he stated. "You cannot oppose funding for

Amtrak and then criticize Amtrak for not providing good service. If our country is committed to providing a world-class high-speed rail system in the Northeast Corridor and elsewhere, then it needs to treat Amtrak as an asset and provide Amtrak a long-term, guaranteed funding source."

Focusing on the men and women whose jobs would be threatened by privatizing Amtrak, Scardelletti added, "Most importantly, Amtrak has a dedicated and experienced workforce of ticket agents, baggage handlers, Carmen, on-board service workers, supervisors, machinists, sheet-metal workers, firemen and oilers, engineers and conductors. These workers are vital to operating current and future high-speed rail service.

"Northeast Corridor jobs must remain under the rail laws of the United States," said Scardelletti. "They must remain as good-paying jobs with full benefits. The kind of middle-class jobs the country needs ... the kind of jobs that sustain and fulfill the American dream. Congress must reject the privatization of the Northeast Corridor."



AP / World Wide Photo

Negotiations for TCU and other rail union Coalition members at the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad (MBCR) are moving forward after the National Mediation Board released the talks from mediated bargaining. MBCR provides commuter rail services in the Boston, MA, area.

NMB Releases TCU and Other Coalition Unions On MBCR

On January 26, 2011, the National Mediation Board (NMB) released TCU and all other Coalition unions from further mediated bargaining with the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad (MBCR).

The release starts a 30-day clock running; at the end of which, self-help by either side would be available commencing February 26, 2011. However, it is extremely likely that the White House will appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) before the 30 days expire.

As these negotiations are covered by Section 9a of the Railway Labor Act, which

governs commuter railroads, the Governor of Massachusetts can demand the creation of a PEB even if the White House doesn't act.

Assuming a PEB is appointed before February 26, it would have 30 additional days to hold hearings and render its non-binding recommendations. However, under the protracted requirements of 9a, the parties could not resort to self-help until after a second PEB is convened and issues its recommendations. The entire process from beginning to end could take as long as 240 days.

"Our goal and that of the other Coalition unions

remains to reach a negotiated agreement," said TCU President Bob Scardelletti.

"No one wants to wait several more months for resolution, and we certainly want to settle this without a strike.

"However, so far, the company persists with unacceptable demands for major cost shifting in our health plans and insufficient wage increases," adds Scardelletti.

"Hopefully, the NMB's action in moving the process to the next step will influence MBCR to reconsider its position, because our members will settle for nothing less than a fair agreement."