



News from the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II — Ranking Member

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Rahall: Republican Plan to Abolish Amtrak ‘Death Knell’ for Passenger Rail Service in America

Washington, D.C. – Republicans on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee today unveiled a controversial partisan proposal to privatize Amtrak that will destroy American jobs, imperil passenger rail service nationwide, and increase costs for the federal government, states, commuter rail agencies, freight railroads, small businesses, and American taxpayers.

“Taking a play out of President Bush’s book, Republicans are dusting off a chronically unpopular proposal that will cripple Main Street by auctioning off Amtrak’s assets to Wall Street,” said U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall (D-WV), top Democrat on the Full Committee. “Instead of abolishing Amtrak, Republicans should abandon this ill-conceived ideological assault on passenger rail service – just as we did when President Bush first proposed it – and work with Democrats to build true high-speed and intercity passenger rail in America.”

Amtrak, a private for-profit corporation, was created by Congress in 1970 to take over passenger rail services previously operated by private rail companies after years of declining ridership and financial losses. With record ridership today, Amtrak currently turns a profit in the Northeast Corridor. Because of its national scope, Amtrak is able to invest this profit to offset less profitable long distance lines in other parts of the country. Without the NEC, Amtrak will be forced to shut its doors or be bailed out by the federal government or deficit-ridden states.

“This plan is a death knell for passenger rail service from coast to coast. Privatizing this profitable corridor will not merely affect train service in that region; it will have a devastating domino effect from coast to coast, leaving trains stuck at the station across the Nation,” said Rahall. “The Auto Train, Capitol Limited, California Zephyr, Cardinal, Coast Starlight, Empire Builder, Palmetto and Silver Service, Texas Eagle and so many other vital lifelines will no longer serve as engines of economic growth but will be mere relics of a bygone era.”

Two years ago, the U.S. Department of Transportation invited proposals from private companies to develop high-speed rail service in America. Despite not one single proposal being submitted by the private sector for developing high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor, Republicans are plowing full steam ahead to abolish Amtrak, hand over the conductor's cap to the U.S. Department of Transportation, and auction off Amtrak's assets to the highest bidder on Wall Street.

"At a time when Washington should be reining in spending, Republicans are peddling a partisan plan that puts the American taxpayer on the hook while they desperately seek fantasy funding from an invisible investor," said Rahall. "In order to create jobs and remain competitive in the global economy, we ought to be looking at ways to help Amtrak achieve the goal of high-speed rail; not looking at ways to dismantle it. We should be united in cheering on its success; not trying to kick it in the caboose by selling off its assets to private companies."

"While Congressman Mica refuses to focus on critical infrastructure issues, he is bent on destroying Amtrak. We have no surface reauthorization bill and next week will be forced to delay the Federal Aviation Administration bill for the 20th time," said U.S. Representative Corrine Brown (D-FL), Democratic Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials "At the very time that we should be working together to solve the problems plaguing this nation's transportation infrastructure, Chairman Mica is introducing divisive legislation that is dead on arrival in the Senate."