

Testimony of  
Jane B. Brophy  
National Railroad Passenger Corporation



Before the  
Vermont House Committee on Transportation  
Hearing on House Bill H.101  
Thursday, February 23, 2023 8:30 a.m.  
Vermont State House, Room 43

Amtrak  
2955 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
(215) 349-1661

Good morning, Chair Coffey, and members of the Committee. My name is Jane Brophy. I serve as Amtrak's Director of Government Affairs for the Northeast at the state and local level. I have been with Amtrak for thirteen years and in my current role for nearly two years. Prior to working in the Government Affairs and Corporate Communications Department, I served in Amtrak's Host Railroad Group. I have a long, productive working relationship with the state's freight carriers on whose tracks much of the state supported Amtrak service operates. In fact, just two evenings ago, my ADA Stations colleague and I presented Amtrak's final plan to the Brattleboro Selectboard for the new station and first high-level platform in the Green Mountain state.

Thank you for inviting Amtrak to appear before the House Committee on Transportation to offer our comments on House Bill H.101, specifically Sec. 26 titled Amtrak Service; Report.

Amtrak is proud of the work we have done with the state, and our continued partnership will ensure those traveling in the state will have greater access to safe, convenient, sustainable train travel. As you know, Vermont residents have two state-supported routes – the *Ethan Allen Express*, which operates from New York City to Burlington, via Albany, and the *Vermont*, which travels between Washington, D.C. and St. Albans, Vermont. These services are cross-state, meaning costs and operational decisions are shared under the provisions of the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, Section 209. This is commonly referred to as PRIIA 209. Under this provision, Amtrak receives funding from 17 states through 20 agencies to support the 28 routes in our network that cover less than 750 miles. PRIIA 209 required Amtrak and its state partners to jointly develop a single, nationwide, and standardized cost-sharing methodology for state supported intercity passenger rail service. Continued operation of state supported routes is subject to annual operating agreements and state legislative appropriations.

In the case of the *Vermont*, while the train bears your state's name, its funding comes not only from Vermont but also from Connecticut and Massachusetts. In addition, it operates over the Northeast Corridor between New Haven and Washington, D.C. Similarly, the *Ethan Allen Express* relies on both Vermont and New York for its funding.

Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Vermont* suspended service north of New Haven in late March 2020. This suspension lasted approximately sixteen months, until service was restored on both services July 19, 2021. In Fiscal Year 2019, the last full year before the onset of the pandemic, the *Vermont* carried just under 100,000 people, and in Fiscal Year 2022, the train carried 87,282, which is 91% of pre-pandemic ridership levels and represents a larger recovery than the corresponding figure for Amtrak's whole national system.

Last year's extension of the *Ethan Allen Express* to Burlington Union Station, which was the result of a combined, multi-year effort by the legislature, the Vermont Agency of Transportation, and Amtrak, has been very successful and provides passenger rail service to three new communities in the state – Middlebury, Vergennes, and Burlington. Ridership on both services for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2023 exceeds first quarter levels of Fiscal Year 2019. That's a great trend we hope to see continue.

Future service extensions impacting the state are contemplated in Vermont's Rail Plan as published on May 7, 2021. Amtrak's role as a service partner and operational carrier in the state is to support and facilitate opportunities for the state to reach full implementation of the Rail Plan. Amtrak's Government Affairs role often involves review of state rail plans, to help provide technical expertise and framework for project goals. As such, Amtrak participates actively in the Vermont Rail Council meetings. These opportunities to interact and explain current conditions; Amtrak's legal and fiscal mandates; and how our corporate goals can be leveraged at the state level, are vital to the realization of the Rail Plan objectives. As my colleagues mentioned, substantial progress has been made for expansion into Montreal, via the *Vermont* route. In fact, both the U.S. and Canada have signed legislation to allow preclearance facilities for improvement of cross-border transportation. Multiple agencies across both countries are working on designs and implementation.

Federal funding opportunities for specific project activities, particularly those administered under the Federal Rail Administration (FRA), often require inclusion in a state rail plan. Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the FRA Corridor ID program provides eligible entities, such as the Agency, to apply for grant monies to study new corridors or expansions of existing routes. We support the Agency's efforts as outlined in the Rail Plan.

I'd like to briefly address the issue of Food service.

In May 2022, Amtrak convened a Food & Beverage Working Group, as required by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Congress charged the group with developing recommendations to improve Amtrak's onboard food and beverage service. Consistent with the Congressional requirement, the group consists of representatives from Amtrak; labor organizations representing employees who prepare or provide onboard food and beverage service; non-profit organizations representing Amtrak passengers; and states that fund Amtrak service. The team meets monthly and has formed three sub-groups which meet more often. In fact, the team just gathered in Chicago for a two-day summit which included a tour of commissary and mechanical facilities. The group will prepare a report to Congress which is due May 11, 2023, and Amtrak will then have 180 days to review and respond to the group's recommendations. This will provide any future framework for major revisions to our food and beverage services and/or commissary facilities, which at present on the east coast, reside in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Section 26 subsection (e) addresses the use of a "cabbage" car, specifically a former F40 non-powered control unit, in the operation of the *Ethan Allen Express*. While Amtrak does use cab units in other parts of the country, the use of this car on this route is operationally impossible as it does not fit within the necessary clearance envelope. Additionally, the *Ethan Allen Express* route lacks the necessary infrastructure to turn the train in Burlington, which compels this route to operate with locomotives at both ends of the train. Amtrak has ordered new rolling stock which will be deployed on both the routes in Vermont. These new trains will have cab cars that meet the clearance envelope. Until that equipment is ready, the current arrangement must remain given the operational constraints associated with these routes.

Amtrak utilizes multiple channels to share information and facilitate customer ticketing. Our corporate website, Amtrak.com; a national Call Center based in Philadelphia; and a mobile application provide up to date booking information. IJA funding has allowed Amtrak to advance several technology upgrades across the company, including the website. In fact, next week we are deploying some new changes to how station selections load on the website. These changes to our customer facing assets will improve the overall ticketing experience.

In closing, it's an exciting time for Amtrak and passenger rail in the United States. We look forward to working together with the State to leverage current federal programs to build stronger passenger rail service for citizens of Vermont.

Chair Coffey, and members of the committee, thank you again for this opportunity to testify.