



Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen

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September 29, 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye, Chairman
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room H-218, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Wicker Amendment to the Senate 2010 Transportation-Housing & Urban Development
Appropriations Bill

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Obey, Vice Chairman Cochran, and Ranking Member Lewis:

We are writing regarding an issue of great importance to the members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the United Transportation Union (UTU) who operate and crew Amtrak trains; namely, the above-referenced amendment. If enacted into law, this amendment would force Amtrak to overturn its current policy prohibiting firearms on trains by allowing them to be transported in checked baggage. The current House version of the bill lacks such a provision, and we oppose any measures to force Amtrak to change its current policy of prohibiting firearms on passenger trains based on safety, operational, and financial concerns.

We strongly believe that this provision would seriously jeopardize the safety of our membership, of other crew members on Amtrak trains, and of the intercity rail traveling public. When firearms are transported in checked baggage on aircraft none of the passengers have access to those firearms because they are stored in a segregated cargo hold. In stark contrast, anyone

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riding an Amtrak train need only overpower the on-board crew to have access to the baggage car and any weapons being transported therein. This poses an unacceptable risk, in our opinion.

Not only does this requirement significantly diminish safety, it also is wasteful of precious federal subsidies necessary for Amtrak to fulfill its statutory mandate. Developing and implementing policies and training programs to ensure safety and security of passengers regarding the acceptance of firearms into public mass transportation would strain both Amtrak's financial and personnel resources. The amendment did not provide for additional funding to implement these provisions. As a result Amtrak would have to divert financial resources from important safety and security operating budgets to accomplish the bill's requirements. For example, no additional funds are made available for the capital enhancements needed to properly secure the hundreds of baggage cars in Amtrak's fleet and in handling areas in stations served by Amtrak. Further, the time and attention of Amtrak's safety and security professionals would be diverted.

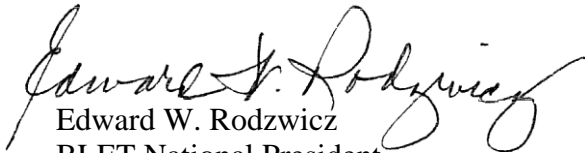
There are several operational concerns with a change to Amtrak's firearms policy. Adding extra procedures during check-in and baggage handling during detraining could adversely affect on-time performance and limit transportation capacity. Moreover, the 6-month period for compliance is wholly inadequate in order for Amtrak to safely and securely implement the changes. Training personnel and procuring additional screening devices would present a time challenge.

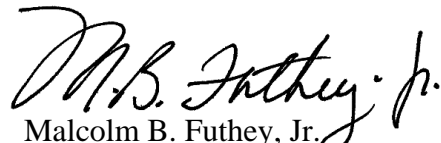
Even if Amtrak was given additional operating funding, capital resources, dedicated personnel, and implementation timing, we would oppose the transportation of firearms on Amtrak trains because such additions of resources could better serve the public by increased investment in Amtrak's infrastructure and rolling stock. Traditional investments in Amtrak have easily documentable returns such as improved safety and increased ridership. Conversely, it is difficult to measure the return on investment to transport weapons, given the added costs involved with safely and securely transporting firearms. In other words, it would be difficult to support an argument that allowing firearms on trains would increase ridership. Indeed, Amtrak had many periods of increased ridership since such time that guns were prohibited entirely from transportation. Ultimately, public funding of Amtrak should be used to increase safety and mobility. Finally, if Congress does mandate an overhaul of Amtrak's firearms policy, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) must consult with Amtrak in this process. Amtrak, in consultation with TSA, should conduct a thorough evaluation and report to Congress on the options for implementing a new firearms policy that provides for the safe and secure transport of firearms on Amtrak trains.

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That being said, we respectfully request that this provision be dropped when the final legislation is developed in conference. Thank you in advance for your most serious consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,


Edward W. Rodziewicz
BLET National President


Malcolm B. Futhey, Jr.
UTU International President

cc: The Honorable Jay Rockefeller, Chairman, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
The Honorable James L. Oberstar, Chairman, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
The Honorable John L. Mica, Ranking Member, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
The Honorable Joseph C. Szabo, Federal Railroad Administrator
Jo Strang, Associate Administrator for Railroad Safety and Chief Safety Officer
Joseph J. Boardman, Amtrak President and CEO
James A. Stem, Jr., UTU National Legislative Director
John P. Tolman, Vice President and National Legislative Representative
UTU Board of Directors
BLET Advisory Board
UTU General Committee of Adjustment
BLET General Committee of Adjustment