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COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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February 14, 2022

By E-Filing

Cynthia T. Brown
Chief of the Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
February 14, 2022
Part of
Public Record

Re: Gulf Coast Passenger Service Between New Orleans and Mobile
STB Finance Docket No. 36496

Dear Surface Transportation Board Members:

I am writing to express concerns regarding the impact on freight rail service and community impacts of Amtrak's proposed Gulf Coast passenger service between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama.

Representing a district that borders Alabama, I have extensive knowledge of how supply chain impacts in either Georgia or Alabama have on local economies and the importance of these freight networks to our regional supply chain. CSX transports raw materials, finished goods, intermodal, and other commodities to facilities in Georgia, the Gulf Coast as well as destinations around North America. Class I railroads connect through rail gateways, such as the one in New Orleans, which is the second largest transfer point behind Chicago. Employers of all sizes rely on CSX to provide an efficient service to meet their business needs. As the former Mayor of West Point, I was glad to work with the railroads to attract business to the region that has spurred economic growth and job creation.

Now more than ever, to fully recover from the pandemic, we need initiatives that improve supply chain capacity. Amtrak's current proposal before the Board does the exact opposite. It threatens the regional and national supply chain by diverting limited freight capacity to passenger service, impairing the service that freight customers receive in this corridor and beyond. This outcome is unacceptable. Fortunately there is a better way.

The affected railroads, CSX and Norfolk Southern, have come to the Board with proposed infrastructure improvements that will preserve freight capacity and service levels while

allowing Amtrak to operate a quality passenger service on the line. The railroads have done so by embracing what I understand to be best practices in transportation planning. They have created a detailed operations simulation that accounts for the growing needs of freight customers in the region over a reasonable, 20-year period, in accordance with federal guidelines and comparable studies.

In light of Amtrak's refusal to provide a detailed operational study of its own, I urge the Board to carefully evaluate the CSX/NS proposal. It is imperative that adequate infrastructure be in place before the start of passenger service so that freight customers and communities are not harmed. In refusing to fund infrastructure upgrades and in acknowledging that freight impacts will result from its service, Amtrak essentially demands a free pass onto the corridor.

These costs are real: to the federal government that has invested in ports and terminals to enhance the supply chain; to the freight railroads to build infrastructure to restore lost capacity; to shippers to accept service delays, lower reliability, or higher shipping costs; to communities to accept longer wait times at blocked railroad crossings; and to air quality when freight trains must excessively idle in wait for passenger trains. Amtrak's cost-shifting gambit is all the more untenable given the billions Amtrak received from Congress just a few months ago. Amtrak has the money and should cover the full cost of its new service.

I call on the Board to require Amtrak to fund and facilitate the construction of all appropriate infrastructure on the Gulf Coast line so that any impairment to the supply chain is avoided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Drew Ferguson". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "A" and a cursive "Drew Ferguson".

Drew Ferguson
Member of Congress