

WILL AINSWORTH
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



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STATE OF ALABAMA

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Office of Proceedings
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Public Record

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

Dear Surface Transportation Board Members:

I write today in opposition to Amtrak's request to utilize freight rail lines to accommodate passenger new rail service on the Gulf Coast. While the prospect of expanded passenger rail has merit, Amtrak's proposal lacks sufficient empirical backing and risks significant unintended consequences for Alabama's economy.

Unimpeded access to transportation infrastructure is essential to a thriving business environment. This is true of all modes of transportation, but it is especially relevant for freight rail. Crucial pillars of Alabama's economy, such as our manufacturing sector, depend on efficient freight rail to access raw materials, maintain strong supply lines, and deliver finished goods to customers in a timely and reliable manner.

Amtrak's Gulf Coast passenger rail proposal will interrupt this critical transportation corridor by creating additional traffic and congestion, putting pressure on the precise scheduling and efficient operations that make freight rail so advantageous. These dynamics would be concerning anywhere in our state, but the fact that Amtrak's seeks to utilize main lines that serve the Port of Mobile makes the proposal even more concerning. The Port is a vital source of economic input and opportunity for Alabama and is essential to companies' ability to access both domestic and international markets.

Negative impacts to the operations at the Port of Mobile must be avoided at all costs – especially given the ongoing global supply chain crisis. Amtrak has not sufficiently demonstrated that their plan will not harm the Port, the companies that ship cargo through the Port, or the freight railroads that connect those companies to the Port. What's more, maintaining consistently strong operations at the Port and across Alabama's freight rail network will almost certainly require significant investment in infrastructure upgrades, and it is not yet clear that Amtrak is prepared to fund the cost of these upgrades.

There is precedent for effective partnership between Amtrak and freight railroads with whom it hopes to partner to expand passenger rail service. On the Gulf Coast, however, Amtrak has not yet delivered on the transparent and proactive collaboration that is necessary for a project of this magnitude to succeed.

It is my hope that the Surface Transportation Board will address the concerns my office – along with many others – have outlined before approving Amtrak's proposal. The stakes of this project require the highest level of scrutiny prior to any final decision being made.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Will Ainsworth", written over a horizontal line.

Will Ainsworth
Lieutenant Governor

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cc: FD 36496 Service List