

Durbin, wicker say next Amtrak CEO should continue commitment to national system

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Roger Wicker (R-MS) sent a letter today to Anthony M. Coscia, Chairman of the Amtrak Board of Directors, requesting that the next Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) demonstrate commitment to a unified national passenger rail system.

“Illinois rail lines are at the center of our national transportation network. Maintain, modernizing and expanding this network is vital to our state,” said

Durbin. “Amtrak has made great progress under Joe Boardman’s leadership and passenger rail in Illinois has expanded rapidly giving more and more residents a safe, affordable option when travelling. The next CEO of Amtrak must understand the importance of nationwide investments in our passenger rail system.”

“Numerous states – including Mississippi – rely on Amtrak’s rail service,” Wicker said. “Our nation’s passenger rail system serves as a vital part of our overall transportation structure and our economy. In order to ensure the growth and health of the system, it is essential that Amtrak’s next leader have significant experience and a broad understanding of all three lines of passenger rail service.”

The letter, sent in light of current Amtrak President and CEO Joseph Boardman’s retirement announcement, reads in part: “With the announcement of Boardman’s retirement, it is important that the Board of Directors makes certain that his successor possesses a deep understanding of and support for all three of Amtrak’s lines of service – state-supported, long-distance, and the Northeast Corridor. ... Should the next CEO of Amtrak fail to possess a working knowledge of and experience with the system, the positive steps that you have taken to stimulate growth in rail ridership will be put at risk, making it more challenging for Congress to support funding for Amtrak.”

The full text of the letter follows:

Dear Mr. Coscia:

We are writing to express our interest in seeing that the next Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is someone whose resume includes significant relevant professional experience and a proven commitment to a unified national passenger rail system.

Through our collective leadership on multi-year passenger rail authorizations and annual appropriations, we are committed to the national passenger rail system and are working collaboratively to improve Amtrak’s service. Many of our states pay all capital and operating support for state-supported trains and are planning for improved or expanded service in the coming years. Our residents and economies in communities large and small, rural and urban, rely on Amtrak service. This service provides greater accessibility to balance the need to attract and retain the bright young minds of tomorrow’s workforce and provide transportation options for the growing senior population entering retirement market. For many of our citizens, Amtrak represents the only option for travel beyond the automobile.

We appreciate current President and CEO Joseph Boardman’s commitment to the national network. With the announcement of Boardman’s retirement, it is important that

the Board of Directors makes certain that his successor possesses a deep understanding of and support for all three of Amtrak's lines of service – state-supported, long-distance, and the Northeast Corridor. The health of the entire system is critical for maintaining and improving a passenger rail network. Should the next CEO of Amtrak fail to possess a working knowledge of and experience with the system, the positive steps that you have taken to stimulate growth in rail ridership will be put at risk, making it more challenging for Congress to support funding for Amtrak.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the next Amtrak President and CEO be someone with a demonstrated commitment to a unified national passenger rail system.