



# **Durbin urges FRA to take more active role in ensuring Amtrak's on-time performance**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today pressed the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to take a more active role in working with the freight railroads to ensure Amtrak's on-time performance improves in Illinois and around the country. Amtrak's Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route continues to be one of the worst performing routes in the country. The Illini and Saluki trains are consistently delayed by Canadian National Railway's (CN) freight train interference and the ongoing speed restrictions put in place by CN in 2015.

“Freight interference continues to be the main driver of passenger rail delays on this route and routes across the country. Canadian National in particular has a long history of holding up Amtrak trains and holding back investments that could improve passenger and freight service in downstate Illinois. The FRA must do more to improve Amtrak on-time performance by practicing rigorous oversight of railroads who fail to live up to their obligations under the law,” Durbin wrote in a letter to FRA Administrator Ronald Batory.

Current speed restrictions along a 200 mile stretch of the Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route were put in 2015 as a safety precaution following repeated mechanical issues on the route, but since then, little progress has been made by CN and Amtrak towards an agreeable solution that will finally solve the underlying issue and lift the current speed limit. In today's letter, Durbin urged the FRA to get more involved and convene regular meetings between the leadership at FRA, CN, and Amtrak so the FRA can set deadlines, prevent further delays, and ensure greater accountability.

Full text of the letter is available below:

May 10, 2018

Dear Administrator Batory,

I write to convey the ongoing frustration of my constituents in Illinois over the persistently low on-time performance of Amtrak's Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route, which operates on tracks owned and operated by Canadian National Railway (CN), and I urge the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to take a more active role in working with the freight railroads to ensure Amtrak's on-time performance improves in Illinois and around the country.

Amtrak's Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route continues to be one of the worst performing routes in the country. The Illini and Saluki trains are consistently delayed by CN's freight interference and the ongoing speed restrictions put in place by CN in 2015. Last year, trains on that route arrived on-time only 32 percent of the time. That's simply unacceptable and deserves the FRA's immediate attention and action.

Current speed restrictions along a 200 mile stretch of the Chicago-Champaign-Carbondale route were put in 2015 as a safety precaution following repeated mechanical issues on the route, but since then, little progress has been made by CN and Amtrak towards an agreeable solution that will finally solve the underlying issue and lift the current speed limit. My constituents have waited long enough while the Amtrak service they rely on has suffered. It's time for the FRA to take on a larger oversight role in the ongoing dispute between Amtrak and CN, and I urge you to begin convening regular meetings between the leadership at FRA, CN, and Amtrak that include my staff so the FRA can set deadlines, prevent further delays, and ensure greater accountability.

But while the current speed restrictions certainly impact on-time performance, they are only partly to blame for the route's poor on-time performance. Freight interference continues to be the main driver of passenger rail delays on this route and routes across the country. Canadian National in particular has a long history of holding up Amtrak trains and holding back investments that could improve passenger and freight service in downstate Illinois. The FRA must do more to improve Amtrak on-time performance by practicing rigorous oversight of railroads who fail to live up to their obligations under the law.

Reliable, safe and on-time rail service is vital to the Illinois economy. I believe you can help improve Amtrak's on-time performance issues significantly by increasing the FRA's oversight of the freight railroads.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,