

"An Injury To One Is An Injury To All"

Pennsylvania Federation

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Office of the General Chairman
Jed Dodd

June 7, 2005

To: All Amtrak Committees

Re: Amtrak Is Falling Apart

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

In the recent period we have seen some incredible infrastructure and equipment failures that literally threaten to destroy Amtrak. Some examples of these failures are:

1. **Brakes Fail.** Amtrak is forced to remove their Acela service due to unsafe brakes and it was further reported that they were aware of this problem THREE years ago and did nothing when they were first informed about the problem.
2. **Bridge Fire.** A fire on Portal Bridge last month which shut down the Northeast Corridor and bottled up trains from Boston to Washington was the direct result of Amtrak's refusal to perform routine inspections and their policy to maintain by exception rather than to prevent problems.
3. **Deferred Maintenance Report.** A report of Inspector General Mead of the US Department of Transportation issued on November 18, 2004 indicates that major infrastructure failure on Amtrak is simply a matter of time. The report is over thirty pages long and a complete copy of the report can be found on our web site at www.pennfedbmwe.org or you may obtain one by contacting the office.

In the report the Inspector General stated:

"Unsustainably large operating losses, poor on-time

performance, and increasing levels of deferred infrastructure and fleet investment are a clarion call to the need for significant changes in Amtrak's strategy. Continued deferral brings Amtrak closer to a major point of failure on the system but no one knows where or when such failure will occur."

For those of you in the field everyday this is not news. You are literally seeing the railroad deteriorate around you. Unfortunately this is what happens when politicians operate a railroad rather than railroad professionals dedicated to a safe and reliable operation. Amtrak President Gunn is playing a dangerous shell game and the lives of the employees and passengers are the stakes.

Furthermore, when something does go wrong, the David Gunn team will try to blame the worker on the ground for the failure rather than the failed management policies which have brought us to the brink of this precipice. We can not stand idly by and remain silent. Attached is a joint letter that we have written with the Engineer's Union to the FRA calling for the FRA to:

"...immediately initiate a safety audit of Amtrak's equipment and physical plant maintenance programs and systems, to determine what other systems may be near imminent collapse, before an accident occurs that leads to a tragic loss of life and limb..."

We can be sure that the David Gunn team will not assume responsibility for this situation. They will try to assess the blame to you. We do not have the power to force these railroad politicians to properly maintain the railroad. Hopefully the FRA will do their job and make this happen. You do have the power to protect yourself when the David Gunn team starts to point their fingers at you. If you are a track inspector make sure that you have reported the problem on your report and make sure you have slow ordered the railroad where it is needed. Employees in all of the crafts are urged to follow the same advice and make sure that you have done what you can to correct a potentially hazardous situation. Usually this means you have properly reported it to management and can prove that you did it when that management employee forgets that you reported the problem to them.

The David Gunn team is willing to let the railroad dangerously deteriorate. When their risk turns bad they will not accept the responsibility for the failure and will be looking for you to blame for it. There are simple ways to protect yourself against this and we would urge you to take those steps now. When the railroad fails, don't be there holding the bag.


In Solidarity,

Jed Dodd
General Chairman



Mark B. Kenny
General Chairman

BLET General Committee of Adjustment

Amtrak/MBCR/Connex

BMWED Pennsylvania Federation



Jed Dodd
General Chairman

June 3, 2005

Mr. Joseph Boardman, Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1120 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Safety Crisis on Amtrak

Dear Administrator Boardman:

At the outset, we would like to congratulate you on being selected as the new Administrator for the FRA. Your job is a critical one and we want to assure you that we will work as closely as we can with the FRA to guarantee that the members we represent and the public are afforded the safest and most secure transportation services possible. It is in this spirit that we write to you.

Ironically, there are times when events occur which are so enormous that they simply fail to attract the level of scrutiny properly deserved because, by their very nature, they overwhelm the available resources of the authorities empowered to monitor same or because they cross over defined boundaries of area-specific responsibility. Consequently, constructive resolution of such matters may end up residing in a unresolved state of limbo, with the interested parties genuinely believing the issue is being handled and properly addressed elsewhere. Due to the numerous political implications typically surrounding the national passenger rail system, oversight scrutiny of the Amtrak property stands as a prime case in point.

Over the past several months, the dire prediction of the DOT Inspector General — *i.e.*, that Amtrak President David Gunn's policy of deferred maintenance will come back to haunt Amtrak (copy of DOT Inspector General Report attached) — has, in our view, been validated. The failure of the braking systems on the Acela equipment, coupled with the fire on the Portal Bridge, when analyzed objectively, indicate that the very core of Amtrak is beginning to fall apart — in other words, a safety crisis currently exists on Amtrak that threatens the riding public and Amtrak's employees. Sadly, we believe no other conclusion than that Inspector General Mead's "cause and effect" prediction is coming to pass.

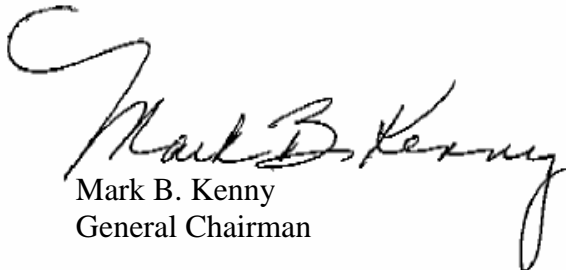
Mr. Joseph Boardman, FRA Administrator
June 3, 2005
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We are, therefore, calling on the FRA to immediately initiate a safety audit of Amtrak's equipment and physical plant maintenance programs and systems, to determine what other systems may be near imminent collapse, before an accident occurs that leads to a tragic loss of life and limb, which otherwise could be preventable . We ask that this audit be conducted on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, as this is where both the Acela operated and where the Portal Bridge fire occurred.

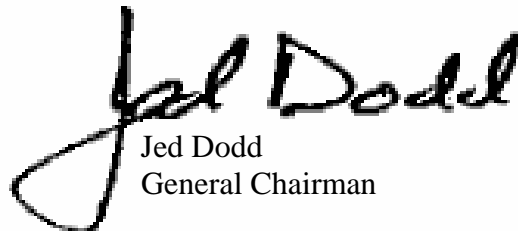
The history of this industry establishes, beyond question, that deferred maintenance doesn't work on freight railroads. On passenger roads, such as Amtrak, deferred maintenance practices should not and cannot be tolerated. The magnitude of the failures over the past couple of months demonstrates that loss of life and limb may well be just around the corner. The urgency of our request is underscored by the fact that the Congress is — as we write — taking up the question of Amtrak funding once again.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and sincerely look forward to working with the FRA to resolve these problems.

Yours truly,



Mark B. Kenny
General Chairman



Jed Dodd
General Chairman

Attachment



The Star-Ledger

Breaker failed to avert rail span blaze

Amtrak says installation of new device was botched

Saturday, June 04, 2005

BY JOE MALINCONICO
Star-Ledger Staff

The mid-May fire that nearly destroyed a key railroad bridge on the route between Newark and Manhattan should have been prevented by a system that cuts off power whenever overhead wires come down, officials said.

But one of Amtrak's circuit breakers -- an upgraded model that had been installed the previous month -- failed to shut off the power that night, allowing more than 12,000 volts of electricity to surge to the wooden bridge for more than 12 seconds, igniting the blaze.

Why didn't the new circuit breaker work?

Amtrak officials say the crew that installed the device never fully connected it to the electrical system and their error somehow went undetected during testing.

That stunning lapse has prompted the federal railroad agency to revise its procedures for installing and testing circuit breakers. Officials refused to say whether Amtrak disciplined the employees responsible for installing the circuit breakers.

The blaze on May 12 halted Amtrak and NJ Transit trains on the Northeast Corridor between Newark and New York for 10 hours and only a quick response from local firefighters saved the bridge, preventing a prolonged service shutdown that would have affected almost 60,000 commuters for weeks, if not months, officials said.

"We were very fortunate," said Amtrak spokesman Cliff Black. "It could have been a major transportation disruption."

Amtrak has dozens of circuit breakers along its Northeast Corridor tracks in New Jersey as part of a system designed to prevent fires or other problems when the railroad's overhead power lines rip apart.

If the circuit breaker at the Portal Bridge, which crosses over the Hackensack River between Secaucus and Kearny, had been working last month, rail crews probably could have fixed the broken wire and restored train service within a couple hours, officials said.

Amtrak's investigation of the fire concluded that the power line at the 95-year-old bridge broke because of "internal fatigue," which Black said had not been detected during an inspection using an infrared gun on May 5. The railroad says it performs monthly inspections on the overhead wires.

But leaders of the railroad's maintenance workers union dispute Amtrak's version of its inspection program. They say Amtrak had discontinued routine inspections on the overhead power wires several years ago and now sends out crews only when there are problems.

"This fire was the result of the deferred maintenance policies of Amtrak management," said Jed Dodd,

general chairman of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees.

Dodd said the rail crew sent to the Portal Bridge on May 5 was not conducting a routine, full-scale inspection of the power line, but instead was responding to a report of a problem with the wire.

"They do maintenance by exception, and when you maintenance by exception you get trouble," Dodd added. "It's just a matter of time before you have a passenger fatality if the policies in place continue."

A November 2004 report by the inspector general of the federal transportation department says that Amtrak has put off crucial repairs because of its financial struggles.

"This continued deferral of capital reinvestment increases the likelihood of operating disruptions from infrastructure failures, yet there is no way to know when such failures might occur," said the report.

Nowhere would service disruptions have as much impact as on the Northeast Corridor between Newark and Manhattan, the busiest section of railroad in the country where trains roll through at 2 1/2 minute intervals during rush hour.

NJ Transit pays Amtrak more than \$120 million a year for its use of the Northeast Corridor, including \$50 million earmarked for capital repairs. NJ Transit spokeswoman Lynn Bowersox said the fire last month "punctuates the criticality of adequate federal funding to bring the Northeast Corridor to a state of good repair."

Bowersox also said NJ Transit was concerned about the botched installation of the circuit breaker near the Portal Bridge.

"But we're satisfied with Amtrak's change in protocols, which (NJ Transit) engineers believe will prevent a recurrence," Bowersox said.

Basically, Black said, Amtrak would conduct a second test on all newly installed breakers to make sure they are connected properly.

Meanwhile, the railroad figures it will take a year to repair the damage done to the bridge, its water cables and the wooden fenders designed to protect the structure from river traffic. The cost of those repairs will be about \$4.6 million, Black said.

Joe Malinconico covers transportation. He may be reached at jmalinconico@starledger.com or at (973) 392-4230.

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