

**Statement of the Honorable Corrine Brown, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
Hearing on Amtrak Reauthorization
May 14, 2008**

The Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials will come to order.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on Amtrak reauthorization. Amtrak was last reauthorized by Congress in 1997.

Fifty years ago, President Eisenhower created the National Highway System, which drastically changed the way we travel in this country. Today we need to do the same thing with passenger rail, and make the level of investment necessary for it to become even more successful for the 21st Century.

That is why I am so excited about H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act which was recently introduced by Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica, Subcommittee Ranking Member Shuster, and myself. It provides \$2 billion per year for capital and operating grants, \$500 million per year for developing state passenger corridors, \$345 million per year to pay down debt, \$345 million per year for high speed rail projects, \$60 million to start work on constructing a new tunnel through Baltimore, and it requires a plan for restoring service to the Sunset Limited line from New Orleans to Sanford, Florida.

Amtrak is extremely valuable to our country. It takes cars off of our already congested highways, it reduces congestion in the skies, and it's better for the

environment. In many areas of the country, Amtrak is the only mode of transportation available. They have shown major increases in ridership too, as ridership has increased in 8 of the last 9 years, and reached a record level of 25.8 million passengers this last year. And with the cost of gas potentially rising to \$4 a gallon, there will be even more riders lining up for Amtrak.

Unfortunately, for many years, Amtrak has been given just enough money each year to limp along, never getting the necessary funding to make serious improvements to the system. The High Voltage Electrical System is over 70 years old, 65% of the bridges were built before 1920, and several tunnels that trains travel through every day were built in the 1800's.

In 2005, Amtrak conducted a comprehensive review of its capital needs. The review determined that Amtrak should invest \$4.2 billion to bring their infrastructure to a state of good repair. Today, with the backlog of major bridge and tunnel work, the necessary investment capital has approached an estimated \$6 billion.

As other countries continue to invest tens of billions of dollars each year to improve their passenger rail systems, we are falling further behind by deferring these much needed improvements to our system.

We must find a way to speed up Amtrak's backlog of repair work and bring its assets to a State of Good Repair so that Amtrak can concentrate on increasing

capacity, increasing speed, developing new facilities, and planning for the future.

These major infrastructure improvements are also necessary to improve the safety and security of the system and its passengers and workers. Amtrak has, and will continue, to play a critical role in evacuation and transporting citizens during national emergencies. Unfortunately, it is also a prime target for those who wish us harm, and we must provide resources to make the system less vulnerable.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House and Senate to pass this important legislation. The United States used to have a strong passenger rail service. Now we're the caboose and they don't even have cabooses anymore. The American people

deserve better, and I believe that this Amtrak reauthorization bill will go a long way to bring the US to its rightful place as the world leader in passenger rail

With that, I want to welcome today's panelists and thank them for joining us. I look forward to hearing their testimony.

Before I yield to Mr. Shuster, I ask that Members be given 14 days to revise and extend their remarks and to permit the submission of additional statements and materials by Members and witnesses.

Without objection, so ordered. I now yield to Mr. Shuster for his opening statement.