

Amtrak's New Direction Hurts Workers, Rural States

Who We Are: Most Amtrak employees are represented by a labor union, whose jurisdiction is divided by “craft,” or job function. Three crafts -- representing service, clerical, and maintenance employees -- have been under attack recently: the Transportation Communications Union (TCU/IAM), the Transport Workers Union (TWU), and Unite-HERE.

Why We're Here: The three unions participating in today's advocacy seek to educate Members of Congress about the direction Amtrak is taking. Under the leadership of President and CEO Richard Anderson, Amtrak's labor relations have taken a hostile turn, and proposed service route changes threaten transportation access for millions. This change is detrimental not only to the employees, but to Amtrak's service to the traveling public.

Recent Attacks on the National Network

In 1970, Congress created Amtrak by chartering a *national* passenger railroad consisting of service lines that freight carriers no longer wanted to operate, but that Congress believed were important to maintain proper transportation access and diversity among modes. This system has operated for the most part successfully for nearly 50 years.

Under current leadership, Amtrak is seeking to *unilaterally* alter its service routes in a misguided attempt to drastically cut onboard services and discontinue lines perceived as unprofitable. This includes a recent attempt to split up the Southwest Chief route and substitute part of it with bus service – passengers would get off the train, board a bus, and then re-board a train hundreds of miles later. House and Senate members [firmly pushed back](#) against this proposal, and in the FY19 spending bill Amtrak was required to continue the Southwest Chief's existing route.

Nonetheless, a recent [Wall Street Journal article](#) exposed Amtrak management's long-rumored goal of replacing the national network with a regional “city pairs” model. This new model would gut service for millions of Americans in rural states, throw funding and service structures into chaos, and significantly undermine the political dynamic that has sustained Amtrak for almost 50 years. [See Amtrak's leaked map, Figure 1]



Hundreds of TCU members rally at Riverside City Hall to save their jobs. 500 jobs were later eliminated in January, 2019.

Amtrak's New Motto: Outsource Everything

Amtrak's new leadership is seeking any-and-all ways to outsource work away from its own skilled, unionized workforce.

Onboard Service Workers

One of the pleasures of long distance train travel is the opportunity to dine with fellow travelers in a decent dining car with the scenic vistas of America passing by. But on June 1, 2018, Amtrak President Richard Anderson cut dining car service on two long-distance lines: the Capitol Limited and the Lake Shore Limited. Passengers on these lines - paying upwards of \$1000 a ticket - had their freshly-prepared hot meals replaced with cold pre-packaged food.

[\[Must Read: "Want Airline food? Take Amtrak" *Railway Age*, 4/19/18\]](#)

These meals are prepared by outside contracted food services: Fresh Creative Cuisine and Direct Food Supplies. As a result, TWU-represented chefs were furloughed. Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson claimed that no jobs were lost, but these workers with decades of rail service were forced to either uproot their lives and relocate thousands of miles away, start new careers over again in another position, or stop working for Amtrak altogether. In addition, workers with little seniority were furloughed as a result.

Amtrak has recently touted a hot meal choice being reintroduced to these trains. The meals are prepared *off-site* by Fresh Creative Cuisine and then *reheated* by service attendants on the train before being served to the passengers.



TWU and Unite-HERE chefs and service staff lost their jobs as a result of drastic service cutbacks

On August 31, 2018, Amtrak issued a 28-page Request for Information (RFI) for Managed Onboard Food and Beverage Service. Amtrak asked prospective contractors to include their ideas on staffing requirements for both Amtrak employees and contractor-provided staff (pg. 18, item 4.7). For an outsider's perspective, read this excerpt of an analysis of Amtrak's RFI announcement by Trains Magazine:

*The intent "to transform and reshape all services on Amtrak trains," and include proposals for "staffing café/lounge cars, dining cars, and Acela First Class for all departures (with and without Amtrak employees performing the work)" also **sends a clear message to current employees that their efforts, diligence, and future loyalty to the company are not respected or appreciated.** Judging from passengers Trains interviewed on a Lake Shore Limited trip this week and two previous samplings of cold*

meal service this summer, customers connecting from trains with traditional dining car service have generally not embraced Amtrak management's decision to introduce "contemporary and fresh dining choices. [["Analysis: Amtrak trends continue in exploration of outside food service providers" Trains Magazine, 9/13/18\]](#)

If this work is contracted out, Amtrak's service workers face the **potential loss of up to 1,700 onboard service jobs**. The loss of these good, union jobs would have a major impact on the lives of our members and would impose a tremendous burden on the Railroad Retirement system.

The original deadline to submit RFI responses was October 16, 2018, but it was subsequently extended to January 25, 2019. TWU has submitted a FOIA request to Amtrak to provide the names of the contractors that responded to the RFI. Amtrak has yet to reply.

Amtrak onboard service staff ("OBS") were the heroes of Coast Starlight 11

On Feb. 26th, 2019, Amtrak's Coast Starlight made national headlines when the train was disabled for over 36 hours outside Oakridge, OR, in the middle of a snowstorm. Amtrak's OBS crew emerged as heroes during this ordeal, working tirelessly to keep 183 passengers comfortable and well-attended to:

- [CNN](#): ""Staff has been wonderful, accommodating. (They) gave families sleeper cars for free for small children. The staff has been great."
- [The Oregonian](#): "...The crew onboard helped passengers weather their ordeal, handing out supplies, food and water. But after their ordeal ultimately ended, passengers one after another mentioned one person as a source of kindness who helped them manage the ordeal and, maybe more importantly, brought them comfort: James Lake...'He kept the whole train connected in a family kind of way...It rekindled my faith in humans,' said passenger Barbara May, a 64-year-old retiree traveling from Eugene to Klamath Falls with her dog Scruffy."
- [@Tracy27](#) on Twitter: "James the Cafe dude is a rockstar. Last we heard he was fashioning diapers out of napkins and safety pins"

[Onboard Service Workers Are Highly Trained Professionals](#)

The first job of every Amtrak worker is safety. Unfortunately, current Amtrak management appears to lack understanding of what onboard service (OBS) staff actually do on the job. Of course OBS staff serve food and beverages to passengers, and this is an important part of the service Amtrak provides. Passengers expect and need this amenity, and it results in increased ridership. But protecting passengers, not food service, is their first priority. Given the environment in which OBS staff work, emergencies can occur in remote locations that are difficult to access. Emergency responders, such as fire and rescue personnel, cannot always arrive on the scene immediately.

This means on-board workers are the first responders in the event of an emergency. Unlike restaurant workers, Amtrak's OBS workers are required to take several training modules that prepare them to respond to anything, from a derailment, to a medical emergency, to a security breach. The following examples outline only some of our training requirements:

- **Emergency Preparedness Training:** OBS staff receive training to be prepared to respond to any emergency situation, such as a derailment, service interruption or fire. OBS staff are also required to have emergency preparedness training to respond to injuries and illnesses, which includes emergency care that covers CPR and the use of automatic defibrillators. This training is required every two years and staff are not permitted to work if training is not current.
- **First Aid Training:** OBS staff receive training to be prepared to respond to an on-board injury or illness of a passenger or co-worker and are governed by first aid protocols.
- **On-Board Passenger Safety Training:** OBS staff receive training to be prepared to assist passengers with on-board safety *while* on the train. OBS staff assist passengers with basic but important requirements while on board, such as safe boarding and exit, proper footwear, protection from loitering in vestibules, running, and using seatbacks and luggage racks for stability.
- **Training to Assist Passengers with Disabilities:** OBS staff receive training to assist passengers with disabilities -- both non-wheelchair and wheel-chair assistance -- and service animals.
- **Emergency Evacuation Training:** OBS staff receive training to evacuate passengers from trains in the event of an emergency, to use emergency on-board equipment and to respond to particular types of accidents, such as train emergencies in tunnels.
- **Training on Responding Bomb Threats/Unattended Items:** OBS staff receive training to be prepared to respond in the event of a bomb threat or other terrorist activity, and training to be vigilant for unattended items and how to respond.
- **Training on FDA Rules and Inspections:** OBS staff receive training on FDA rules and inspections. These are governed by policies and procedures for the safe handling of food, the inspection and monitoring of food service equipment, including refrigerators and freezers, and safe procedures for supplying coaches with water and refilling storage tanks.
- **Human Trafficking Identification:** OBS staff -- and other Amtrak personnel -- are trained annually on how to identify and address possible victims of human trafficking.

Riverside Call Center (~500 jobs lost)

On November 14th, 2018, [Amtrak announced](#) to its employees that it would close its Riverside, CA call center in 60 days and consolidate operations at its last remaining in-house call center in Philadelphia, resulting in [the elimination of at least 500 jobs](#). Amtrak cited a drop in call volume but then refused to provide the employees' union or Congress with data to back up this claim.

At the same time, Amtrak contracted with a third-party business process outsourcer in Port St. Lucie, FL to perform this same work, further undermining its claim that the closure was necessitated by a drop in call volumes. To add insult to injury, Amtrak required many Riverside employees to unwittingly train their replacements at the outsourcer.

Lastly, 60 days is merely the WARN Act-required *minimum* amount of time to provide employees notice.

Several letters were sent to Amtrak urging it to at least delay the closure of the facility. Signers included every [House](#) and [Senate](#) Democrat from California – as well as Republican Congressmen Paul Cook and [Ken Calvert](#). Various state legislators wrote Amtrak as well. All requests were ignored.



"Closing Amtrak's facility in Riverside would be a disservice to the employees who have dedicated their time and careers to Amtrak, as well as to the people of California who comprise over one-third of Amtrak's total ridership and whose state and federal tax dollars support Amtrak's operations."

—
SEN. DIANNE FEINSTEIN AND KAMALA HARRIS



Rural Station Agents

In 2018, Amtrak announced the removal of TCU-represented station agents from 15 stations around the country. This resulted in the elimination of approximately 35 high quality jobs. They were subsequently replaced by non-union contract “caretakers.”

These changes triggered protests in many communities, with local press pieces and op-eds printed from Texas to Montana. As Montana’s *Havre Daily News* described:

...Some people have said the cuts and changes ignore other services ticket agents perform - for example, a Havre ticket agent helped a passenger get life-saving medical care in April, then helped him get aboard the train and headed onward several days later - and ignores issues ranging from ticket agents telling passengers what is available in the community and collecting baggage to get it onto the baggage car. Other services include answering calls about the schedule and the fact that if no ticket agent is present, children cannot get on the train unless an adult guardian is traveling with them... [Havre Daily News, 3/1/19]

The pushback from local communities was so great that Congress’ FY2019 spending bill included language intended to fix the problem, but in the negotiations, some Members pushed to preserve the caretakers’ jobs as well, equating the positions of “Station Agent” and “Caretaker.” This language not only undermines union grievance claims but *encourages Amtrak to replace MORE station agents with caretakers.*

Amtrak’s spokesperson addressed this with the [Shelby Promoter \(3/13/19\)](#):

The Havre newspaper article leads people to believe that Amtrak station agent helps load checked luggage in Longview, TX these depots...That is not the case. Amtrak must provide ticket agents or caretakers at these depots. There are caretakers at these locations...It directs us to provide customer service by station agents as ticket agents or caretakers...It applies to 18 ticket window locations in 14 states where they were closed between Oct. 1, 2017, and Sept. 30, 2018.



TCU’s Legislative team is currently seeking remedies in some form of clarification from Congress, as well as concrete language that would direct Amtrak to return actual, unionized Station Agents to their respective stations.

Amfleet Refurbishment

In October, 2018, Amtrak announced its plans to contract out the work of refurbishing and repairing its Amfleet 1 and 2 cars at their yards in Ivy City, DC and Hialeah, FL. These contractors will be brought on to the properties alongside in-house, unionized carmen and electricians to perform the same work.

Traditionally, this work would be put up for bid, with the subsequent jobs being assigned to qualified carmen. However, Amtrak did not announce any of this work ahead of time, choosing to hire an outside contractor. In Hialeah, FL it is bringing in 82 contractors. The same issue is occurring in Ivy City, DC with 22 contractors onsite. Machinist Union representatives approached Amtrak's Chief Operating Officer and inquired about the work, but Amtrak had already bid out the contract.

We have grave concerns about the safety of these contractors performing this work carefully and safely. Seasoned Amtrak shop craftsmen (machinists, carmen, electricians, etc.) are highly-skilled workers with the proper safety training to perform this work in a hazardous environment.

Amtrak's Common Refrain

On February 7th, 2019, [Richard Anderson testified](#) before the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. When asked about Amtrak's plans for its Beech Grove, IN maintenance facility, Anderson assured the Committee that "in the *current* budget, there's no plans to close Beech Grove." This wording has become a common refrain of Amtrak management testifying before Congress, in an attempt to avoid stating true intentions and long-term goals.

When asked about how a shift in maintenance operations would impact employees or layoffs, Anderson stated "...we can't do it on the backs of labor, it has to be in a way that we mediate the issues in a way that doesn't impact people..." This statement came just days after the closure of the Riverside, CA call center that hastily terminated the positions of 500 employees (see above).

Bottom line: Congress must remain vigilant in its oversight of Amtrak's operational and service changes – especially with regards to how their proposals impact employees and rural services.

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