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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4209**

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IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

February 11, 2020

Mr. Richard H. Anderson  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Amtrak  
1 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Anderson,

I am writing to express concern about the answers to the questions for the record that was submitted on your behalf regarding recent changes to Amtrak's food and beverage service.

Since service started in 1971, dining cars have been an integral part of Amtrak. The dining car service is an intrinsic part of the rail experience, which is an important factor in travelers' decisions to choose traveling by rail rather than driving or flying. Yet in June 2018, traditional dining car service was eliminated on two long-distance routes.<sup>1</sup>

Even worse, in September 2019, Amtrak announced that traditional dining car service would be limited on most other eastern long-distance routes.<sup>2</sup> Passengers traveling these long-distance routes no longer have access to meals freshly prepared onboard, including sleeper car passengers whose premium ticket fare includes meals. Instead, sleeper car passengers receive "flexible dining" service that includes reheated pre-cooked meals. Other passengers only have access to quick-service foods sold in the café car.

<sup>1</sup> "New and contemporary dining soon on two amtrak routes," *Amtrak*, <https://media.amtrak.com/2018/04/new-contemporary-dining-soon-two-amtrak-routes/>

<sup>2</sup> "Amtrak introduces enhanced menu and flexible dining experience on five routes," *Amtrak*, <https://media.amtrak.com/2019/09/amtrak-introduces-enhanced-menu-and-flexible-dining-experience-on-five-routes/>

During the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials hearing, “Amtrak Now and Into the Future” on November 13, 2019, you stated that “decisions such as eliminating dining car service are based on market survey data and customer feedback.”<sup>3</sup>

When asked to provide the referenced market survey data, you provided a standard questionnaire that only included six questions related to food and beverage service in the café/lounge car and in the dining car. These questions do not address the changes from traditional dining car service to the “contemporary dining” changes nor does the survey give customers the opportunity to compare the two dining experiences.

Additionally, when asked to provide detailed customer responses, you supplied vague answers without evidence.

For instance, when asked what percentage of survey respondents indicated that they preferred an alternative dining solution to the dining car service, you responded that “we have seen very positive trends in customer acceptance since introducing the new model” without providing those trends. When asked whether the feedback has been more positive or negative on the long-distance routes since the dining services were changed, you responded that “...Amtrak has continued to refine the product by adding a hot entrée in July 2018 and expanding our hot options in January 2019.”

These answers are insufficient and unacceptable.

When Congress deliberately created both Amtrak and the long-distance network, it understood the importance of providing a comfortable, quality service to passengers. Long-distance trains in particular require passengers have access to food options not only for basic nutritional needs, but to maintain customer satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

I am concerned that your decision to eliminate such a popular American tradition was not based on sufficient market survey data and may negatively impact Amtrak ridership. Therefore, I respectfully request that you provide clarification to your answers in questions 3, 4, and 5 by providing:

1. The percentage of survey respondents that indicated that they preferred an alternative dining option to the dining car service;
2. The methodology for how customer feedback on dining options factored into the decision to eliminate dining car service on many of Amtrak’s long-distance routes;
3. And whether the feedback has been more positive or negative on the long-distance routes by providing customer survey data on the six food and beverage questions for the café/lounge car and dining car given to all customers over the last two years.

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<sup>3</sup> “Amtrak Now and Into the Future,” *Transportation and Infrastructure Committee*, <https://transportation.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/amtrak-now-and-into-the-future>

<sup>4</sup> Pub L. 91-518, Oct 30, 1970, Sec 101

Thank you for your assistance. Should you have any questions regarding these requests, please contact Alex Schnelle in Congressman Cohen's office at [alex.schnelle@mail.house.gov](mailto:alex.schnelle@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Koenig, David. "FAA to test whether packed planes affect evacuation time," Associated Press. October 18, 2019. <https://apnews.com/422266ca108d41938b93c0a4124ef3f8>