

WASHINGTON, DC-Today, Congressman Blumenauer called on Congress to develop a thoughtful and honest plan for passenger rail at a House Transportation and Infrastructure Railroads subcommittee on the future of Amtrak and rail passenger service.

Congressman Blumenauer issued the following statement on the need for continued support of Amtrak:

"I am deeply concerned that our discussion today on the future of intercity passenger rail is omitting some of the most important voices, namely Amtrak, organized labor, and rail advocates. This is not a balanced hearing, nor is it representative of the views held by the American public regarding the need for or preferred type of national passenger rail service.

"In the Pacific Northwest, public opinion strongly supports the development of a high-speed rail corridor, and also having the federal government step up to the plate to provide Amtrak with much-needed funding so that service is not reduced on the West Coast or elsewhere in the country. This is such an important issue in my district that representatives of the State Transportation Commission have met with me to discuss how they can more actively support Amtrak. Today's hearing provides no voice for those who support a truly national passenger rail system.

"We will undoubtedly hear various proposals today for ways that we can cut up the current rail system and maintain a patchwork of rail corridors under the guise of reducing federal subsidies and making profitable lines. Let's be blunt. No other mode of transportation is required to work under such a ridiculous set of false constraints.

"The federal government provides enormous subsidies to every other mode of transport. In fact, no rail system in the world operates without significant subsidy. Those that are the most successful are also benefited by price signals and land use policies that this country doesn't have the political will to establish.

"Today national passenger rail service faces a false crisis --- one that Congress imposed without an honest acknowledgement of the economic realities facing Amtrak. In the past ten years alone we have failed to come even close to meeting the authorized level of funding for Amtrak. Since its creation, Congress has virtually eliminated Amtrak's ability to alter unprofitable routes, close stations, or relocate its work force. It being required to pay the legacy costs for employees that have never worked for Amtrak. Moreover, as owner of most of

the Northeast Corridor rail lines, it is required to invest hundreds of millions of dollars annually simply to maintain and preserve the rail line for intercity, commuter, and freight rail operations. We now face the very real threat to Amtrak's existence and the provision of intercity rail operations. Quite simply, there is no mode of transportation that could operate under the unrealistic goals that we have imposed on Amtrak.

"I am extremely disappointed that the Administration decided not to participate in today's hearing. They are remiss in not providing leadership on such a critical issue. It has also come to my attention that they have not engaged organized labor or rail advocates in any of their discussions to date on this subject. I had hoped to have the opportunity to question Administrator Rutter about the logic of such a policy.

"I am totally opposed to any plan that would fracture the system. Chopping up a transportation network doesn't make it better. Look at Britain's experience with privatizing their rail network. To ensure quality service and a commitment to safety, someone needs to be in charge. As I have expressed many times in this Subcommittee, I do not want to see another mile of rail infrastructure lost in this country. I hope that working together with the Administration and the Leadership of this Subcommittee we can develop a thoughtful and honest plan for passenger rail."