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Bensalem, PA 19020

January 4, 2006

Mr. David Laney
Jackson Walker L.L.P.
Bank of America Plaza
901 Main Street, Suite 6000
Dallas, TX 75202

Dear Mr. Laney:

As a leading citizen advocate for Northeast Corridor Amtrak commuting and as the owner of the two Amtrak-related websites www.savecornwellsheights.com and www.understandingamtrak.com, I would like to request the favor of a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss the very difficult financial problems Amtrak has chosen to impose upon its roughly 2,000 monthly pass commuters, approximately half of whom, including myself, travel from the greater Philadelphia area to New York City and back, just to make a living. It is my fervent hope that the currently scheduled February commuter fare increase can be cancelled before it puts the final nail in the coffins of the Philadelphia-to-New York job trains. Since Congress accidentally legislated kids off Amtrak trains in its haste to legislatively kill commuter traffic when Amtrak's FY 2006 subsidy package was passed into law in November, there may be an opportunity to fix both problems at the same time.

To be clear, I *strongly* believe Amtrak has made a ***big mistake***, on both *moral* and *monetary* grounds, by raising commuter monthly pass fares 77% in a year, including 59% at a stroke in September, having aired no public policy discussions, no warnings of intent, and no assurances of future policies. Nearly half of the citizens affected by the fare hike commute to their jobs from Philadelphia to New York City, and most of them pay out-of-pocket with after-tax dollars for their transportation to work. For them, the draconian fare hikes of the past year, including the announced and intended upcoming increase in February, total \$5,268 post-tax dollars, which is the equivalent of a \$9,373 pre-tax pay cut for most of them (based on the standard 25% federal tax bracket + FICA, Medicare, NY State, and Philadelphia residential wage taxes). These fare hikes have destroyed much or all of the disposable income of commuters, and are forcing most of them to make difficult, life-changing decisions. Most of those who have not abandoned Amtrak yet will do so within a year.

In September, I had the good fortune to meet with David Gunn and win a much-deserved reprieve from extinction for my small-but-growing Amtrak commuter station, which Amtrak had previously announced would be "abandoned" in October. (Mr. Gunn admitted Amtrak had "screwed up" in attempting to abandon the station, and followed up with a very gracious written apology.) In the process of my working to save the station – taking surveys, meeting trains, doing boarding counts, and talking to fellow passengers –

I got to personally know many of the 35 monthly pass commuters who showed up to go to work almost every day at the station. I have not taken a formal survey of riders at my station since the 30% October fare increase hit, but I can tell you what I know about the 15 specific passengers who rode Amtrak last fall and of whom I still have specific knowledge.

Out of 15 who used to ride, 6 have already stopped using Amtrak. Another 2 plan to move to New Jersey this winter and start riding New Jersey Transit instead. Another one, a young woman, is trying to find a job in Philadelphia because she can't afford to keep her job in New York. A grandmother in her fifties was hoping against hope that her garment industry employer would help her with the commuting costs, and she was considering early retirement as an alternative, but felt she had to last about four more years to increase her benefits. Four others that I know of pre-purchased their monthly passes for up to a year in advance, and are now "riding on borrowed time." One, a journalist putting two children through college, says he will leave Amtrak when his passes run out. I'm not sure what the other three pre-purchasers intend to do when their passes run out, but I expect more attrition. The only monthly pass holder, besides myself, who I still feel confident will be riding a year from now is a woman, about 60, who gave her New York City employer notice that she would have to leave her job in February because she couldn't afford the commute anymore. The employer found a way to cover the increase without giving her a direct raise, so she will still be riding. So will I, because my employer agreed to cover my Amtrak costs when it solicited and hired me five years ago, and it will continue to do so. If they weren't covering the cost, I would probably be gone, too.

Out of the 20 whose fate I don't know, the reason I don't know about some of them is that they are already gone, and I didn't know them well enough to specifically identify their absence.

I only know the intents of one Delaware commuter, a young woman working in the garment industry. She had moved from New York City to Wilmington to be near her family and still have an affordable commute to her job. She plans to move to the vicinity of Trenton, New Jersey, this winter.

Having saved my station from extinction, it hurts all the more to see young people, the age of my first sons, and grandmotherly women discouraged and emotionally wounded by Amtrak's "neutron bomb" attack on commuters, which leaves the station standing, but destroys the people. In Roman days, "decimation" meant loss of one in ten. We, the Amtrak commuters, have already been decimated at least five times over, with more and more to come!

Amtrak's excuse for destroying its own commuter communities was a rather blatant lie. The press release that hurt and changed the lives of so many was entitled "Rising Fuel Costs Lead to Amtrak Fare Increase." The article cited a "40% rise" in the year-to-year cost of diesel fuel, but in FY 2004, by Amtrak's own publicly available accounting, diesel fuel plus electric power, combined together, only amounted to 6% of Amtrak's

budget, so the fuel hike only increased the budget by at most 2%. Commuters don't ride diesel trains anyhow.

At least half of the *real reason for the increase* was buried in the secondary headline of the same press release, "Reserved Service Expands." The rush hour trains that commuters traditionally used to take were primarily "unreserved" trains, meaning that people could buy "unreserved" single ride tickets and hop on any such train at will. Commuters with monthly passes likewise hopped on these trains at will. As a result, sometimes SRO (standing room only) conditions occurred, and some passengers, especially those who had paid top dollar for their tickets, would complain.

The big problem Amtrak saw itself facing with having the rush hour trains suddenly switched over to "reserved" status was the monthly pass commuters. They could still hop on without a ticket or a reservation, and that made predicting SRO conditions more difficult, as it's difficult to know how many will show up for any given train. The solution that Amtrak came up with, it would seem, was to thin the commuters' numbers dramatically – i.e. throw them off the trains – with an unaffordable price increase. Why not just get rid of them? They account for less than 1% of Amtrak's revenue and defray only one half of one percent of Amtrak's budget, so even if the fare hike drives them off the trains and brings about a revenue decrease, no one should notice or care – except the commuters and their dependents.

The other half of the real reason for the increase, as I've heard it explained by several sources, was the administration's demand to make Amtrak break even or die. At some level of Amtrak management – the Board of Directors, from what I hear – it was perceived as an "embarrassment" for a money-losing railroad to allow commuters to ride at a roughly 70% discount off peak fares, even though that had apparently been the norm for decades. In olden days of excess capacity, it actually made good economic and business sense. It probably still makes sense today, but I've heard that *Amtrak management felt forced to "make a show"* of fiscal austerity and toughness this year, so the "show" was a \$9,373 pay cut for Amtrak's most loyal, most appreciative, most dependent, most vulnerable riders who had probably been paying their full marginal cost of transport all along for years and years.

For you to better understand what you, the other Board members, and Amtrak's top fare management team have done, I am herewith enclosing two folders with explanatory materials, one entitled "*Profiles in Pain*," prepared specifically for this mailing, and the other entitled "*Saving Amtrak's Commuters*," copies of which I personally distributed by hand and on foot to a number of key Senators' and Representatives' offices on Capitol Hill on December 16. In the spirit of the season, I didn't want to disturb your domestic tranquility over the holidays with these worries, but now that it is the new year and Father Time is quickly ticking towards Amtrak's *big mistake*, we all must hurry to beat the clock.

I have always understood that leaders of business, government, and industry are often faced with difficult dilemmas in their decision making. Hurting some people in order to

help others is often an unavoidable and sad part of shouldering “the head that wears the crown.” I have always tried to be respectful of this difficulty in my criticism of such leaders. What troubles me about Amtrak’s decision, though, is that it seems not only unnecessarily hurtful to a targeted small legion of Amtrak’s most loyal, appreciative, and dependent riders, but it also appears needless, pointless, ill-conceived, probably cooked up in a fit of political posturing, and *immoral* at its very root. That is why I write.

Consider the following:

- 1) If every single one of Amtrak’s 2,000 monthly pass job commuters chose to accept the soon-to-be-completed 59% fare increase announced in September and continue to ride Amtrak, the revenue gained from them would be slightly less than \$10 million/year. That is enough money to make the difference between a \$1.30 billion subsidy from Congress next year and a \$1.29 billion subsidy from Congress next year. It is 0.3% of the cost of running the railroad.
- 2) If half of the commuters are forced to abandon Amtrak as a commuting option entirely (using cheaper, slower alternatives; changing jobs; moving out of state), Amtrak will likely see a net revenue decrease from commuters of about \$1.5 million. That’s the difference between asking Congress for \$1.3 billion next year and asking Congress for \$1.3015 billion next year, hoping that none of them will ask questions about the tiny little uptick in losses.
- 3) I have heard specious, unsubstantiated arguments that due to limited carrying capacity, we commuters are displacing droves of full-fare riders. In the sudden switching over of Amtrak’s operations to “all reserved” trains, the ejection of almost all New Jersey Transit commuters from Amtrak trains (the end of NJT monthly pass cross-honoring) at the beginning of November, and the simultaneous jacking up of monthly pass fares on those of us who are still left on the rails and have no other good alternatives, I sincerely do not believe that Amtrak’s fare and ridership management structure has figured out yet that it probably only “loses” the income of one full fare rider per day per every 10 to 20 monthly pass tickets that it sells in any given month.
- 4) Given points 1, 2, and 3, plus the fact that I sincerely do believe that at least half of Amtrak’s commuting ridership will be gone within a year, and that commuters rarely do worse than to displace a prospective last-minute ticket buyer from one train to another at similar price (and sometimes onto an Acela upgrade!), I see no point to what Amtrak has done other than to make a show of political posturing and get-tough moralizing over the evils of granting discounted rides to America’s daily job commuters on America’s own subsidized national rail system.
- 5) Absent the argument that monthly pass commuters displace full fare riders, it appears highly likely that, viewed as occupants of “marginal capacity,” commuters were already paying their own “marginal costs” of carriage at the nominal “70% off peak” rate of monthly passes. Indeed, it would appear that that

was the original reason that Amtrak and its ancestor, the Pennsylvania Railroad (via the Penn Central implosion), carried monthly pass commuters at steep discounts, for slightly more than marginal cost. It used to make business sense.

- 6) Should one buy the argument that Amtrak has now become capacity-limited at peak hours, it does not necessarily follow that raising prices so high that half of all commuters will abandon Amtrak will result in a balance sheet win for Amtrak. Amtrak's reaction to getting tight on capacity appears to be more a hysterical rush to throw commuters off the train or gouge them until they cry. I have seen no evidence that Amtrak's management has acquired the necessary skill or the track history of reserved train data to properly comprehend or manipulate a tiered fare system in the context of some moderate capacity constraints.
- 7) In the nearly five years that I have ridden Amtrak to work on a daily basis, I have never boarded an SRO Amtrak train inbound to Manhattan. (I used to see frequent SRO conditions, though, when the thousands of NJT pass holders boarded on ridiculously cheap, cross-honored tickets in mid-New Jersey, but that was a planned people crunch engineered by mutual agreement between Amtrak and NJT.) Likewise, walking the fifteen minutes from my Manhattan office to Penn Station and arriving at the platform 3 to 5 minutes before departure, usually after first boarding call and the rush of the madding crowd, I have hit SRO conditions not more than once a month, even in the days of "unreserved" trains, and usually found an abandoned seat by about 30 minutes out. The vast majority of those SRO conditions were generated by the delayed departure of other Amtrak trains, not by the natural ebb and flow of passengers.
- 8) Prior to Amtrak's enormous fare increases this past year, there has never, to my knowledge, been a single shred of public discussion about monthly passes being priced inordinately low. ***It was never even a known issue.*** For years I suspected that, given Amtrak's fiscal problems, there was either a planned subsidy keeping the prices down, or else we were being carried "on margin" at minimal profit. Unlike farmers in the Midwest who have always realized the money they receive for not growing wheat and not milking cows might drop out from under them in any given year, the commuters who took jobs in Manhattan and those who decided to move from that island to the 'burbs had no idea that there was no subsidy, that the margin was getting tight, and that in a fit of hysterics Amtrak might selectively turn on them and try to throw them off the rails. We all knew that someday Amtrak might die, and we took that risk. We never guessed or had warning that *Amtrak was going to try to kill us instead.* Who would think that a government-chartered railroad that suckles 40% of its funds from the public teat would be allowed to turn on its most loyal, most dependent, most vulnerable, most easily wounded riders – apparently just as a political show of force, since the economics of the move is absurd? This, Mr. Laney, is the great immoral sin of Amtrak. **Good people don't hurt little people for show.**

Once upon a time, in a century long, long ago, the Interstate Commerce Commission was created quite specifically to regulate the railroads in the public's interest, to rein in the abusive excesses of the railroads' capitalistic monopolies. The subsidization of Amtrak, in fact, is the direct descendant of the subsidization of long-distance passenger rail that went on for over two decades in the private sector (starting around the early '50s when passenger rail started losing money for most carriers) because the federal government wouldn't let freight lines drop their unprofitable passenger service or price gouge their seats. **Back then, serving the public was the whole idea.** Roughly thirty billion federal subsidy dollars later, Amtrak, operating conveniently outside the jurisdiction of federal sunshine laws, has decided to act exactly like the uncontrolled, capitalistic, "public-be-damned" renegade corporate animal that its governmental ancestors were built to subdue and control in the public interest.

Is Amtrak, the government-sponsored National Railroad Passenger Corporation, just in business to compete with the airlines and turn a buck?

In search of answers and explanations, I met with a very pleasant man named John Doe at Amtrak's Union Station offices last month to discuss the problems Amtrak has inflicted on commuters and try to understand better why Amtrak felt it necessary to behave the way it did, hurting so many people in the process. It was my understanding that he was the man who was primarily responsible for studying passenger flow and demand and setting fares accordingly. I found him very sincere, moderately concerned about social impact, and seemingly somewhat unfamiliar with the mathematics of the economic models I tried to discuss with him during the half hour we spoke. I do not wish him ill, and I most certainly do not wish to cause him any personal pain and embarrassment. We spoke for about 30 minutes, parted on friendly terms, and exchanged e-mails a few days later. He has since that time gone into "radio silence" (ignoring my latest questions e-mailed to him), and my guess is that he may be concerned that communicating with me may be dangerous or not in Amtrak's best interest. That said, being thankful for his assistance, and wishing only the best for Mr. Doe, I believe you should consider five particular concerns the conversation and e-mail exchange raised in my mind:

- 1) Mr. Doe, apparently in all sincerity, gave me the standard Amtrak explanatory line I've heard before, that a 70% discount and even a 50% discount off peak route fare was higher than that offered by any other railroad (and I believe the reference was to U.S. railroads, like LIRR, Metro-North, etc.). He seemed to find this a sound justification for jacking up commuter prices, and told me he felt they should go higher still. I tried to explain that a national long-distance carrier can and should have a much larger natural spread between maximum and minimum fares than commuter-based rail lines like NJ Transit. Amtrak is a premium service that can carry a small volume of commuters on margin, serve the public, and still make money (compared to not carrying them at all). The rest of the nation's railroads, which are virtually all short-distance commuter systems, can't carry commuters on margin alone, because there's nobody left to pay for the first 80% of the costs, the infrastructure and fixed obligations. The fact that Amtrak has chosen to raise its commuter tier fares from a very competitive 25% premium

over slower regional rail to an unaffordable 120% premium over slower regional rail in the course of a year didn't seem to register with him. The fact that the lowest priced seat on an Amtrak train through New Jersey costs **double** the highest priced seat on any New Jersey Transit train running the same route seemed to make no difference. Somehow, it was only the holy min-max ratio that seemed to matter. The "right" price, incidentally, balancing the benefits of Amtrak travel against its cost, and losing a minimum of riders, is probably very near a 50% premium over regional rail. Many of the former and soon-to-be-former Amtrak riders (who outnumber the riders who I believe will stay) with whom I have consulted agree that for that kind of cost premium, they would stick with Amtrak or come back. Above that level, they'll bail out like lemmings. Even now, before the scheduled February increase, we are well above that level and losing riders fast.

- 2) I told Mr. Doe that Amtrak has lost the confidence of inter-city commuters, that riders fear another huge fare increase will hit the remaining few within a year or so. I mentioned that this fear and lack of an articulated Amtrak policy towards job commuters is preventing potential new riders from accepting job offers in New York City. I requested that Amtrak at least make a reassuring policy statement, more or less to the effect that it was done with hosing over the commuters and would plan, as a matter of corporate policy, to keep fares pegged more or less to inflation or, at least, to the level of percentage increases visited on single-trip riders. He told me that no policy at all existed, that no policy was likely to be articulated, and that he had no idea what was going to happen to commuter fares a year from now, except to say that he felt the fares ought to be priced still higher. It is sad, when this country's subsidized national railroad can't even offer a crumb of reassurance (and we're talking about maybe \$2 or \$3 million of stability inside a \$3 billion budget) to the tiny little fraction of its riders who once trusted their jobs and careers to it. Business travelers will always have adequate alternatives. We commuters have none.
- 3) Mr. Doe expressed concern that Congress in the 1980s had legislated that Amtrak's reason for existence was inter-city passenger rail, and that "inter-city" was defined as trips between cities that are 90 or more miles apart. Philadelphia and New York are 91 Northeast Corridor route miles apart, and their proximity was probably the original inspiration for the 90-mile rule. Being one mile over the legislated legal limit, however, he seemed to feel that the case for carrying Philadelphia-to-New York commuters was marginal and suspect. Never mind that two state lines and the entire state of New Jersey had to be crossed – and that there is no alternative carrier other than the slow, difficult combination of SEPTA and NJ Transit rail systems. (And, to be clear, we're talking about at least 2.5 *extra* hours of commuting per day for the central Philadelphia riders who can't afford to take a nine thousand dollar pay cut!)
- 4) In an e-mail exchange with Mr. Doe, wherein I asked some questions pertaining to the way in which he measures the negative impact of commuters on full price

sales – the exchange which I believe may have caused him to go silent – I discovered what appeared to be a lack of awareness of the economics of price tiering under carrying capacity constraints. He seemed somewhat unaware of the notion that a full price ticket sale lost on one train, because of the presence of a commuter, was not necessarily a full price ticket sale lost to Amtrak's bottom line. It all, of course, depends on whether the prospective rider catches the next train, or, so to speak, heads for the airport. Running all-reserved trains is a very new thing for Amtrak, and I got the impression that Amtrak may not understand some of the basics of the new economic model it is apparently trying to manage. I feel badly about having to voice things that could be perceived as criticism of Mr. Doe himself, after the graciousness he showed in speaking with me honestly. I consider myself to be criticizing Amtrak in general, not Mr. Doe. He is clearly not a bad apple, and he is clearly also a very bright and dedicated Amtrak employee. I seek and wish nothing ill for him, but I think you should at least question, in your role as head of the Amtrak Board of Directors, whether Amtrak understands its own economic fare models.

- 5) I asked Mr. Doe whether, due to fiscal austerity, it is now Amtrak's policy to maximize the revenue from its monthly pass commuters – and everyone else, for that matter – even if that means raising prices so high that many can no longer afford to commute to their jobs. In other words, is America's National Railroad Passenger Corporation just out to squeeze passengers for as many dollars as possible, regardless of the social consequences or moral obligations incurred by having lured commuters to take far-distant jobs back when prices were affordable and predictable from year to year? He said it was a good question, and I could tell he felt uncomfortable about admitting that maybe today Amtrak is just about money, not about people or serving the public.

In my past few weeks of research, building dossiers of Internet links on each of the members of the Amtrak Board of Directors in preparation for making public the case for the plight of Amtrak's commuters, I have learned a lot about you and the other Board members. (And I've also discovered within myself a new, surprise fondness for some well-written GAO reports!) There are about 10,000 web pages referencing you, Mr. Laney, in particular, and a similar number referencing Mr. Hall or institutions on which he has left his eponymous mark. There are a few hundred on Messrs. Sosa and Rosen, and nearly 200,000 which reference the better-known and yet ever-absent Mr. Mineta. You all appear to be good men.

I've been favorably impressed by how much you have done for transportation in Texas, Mr. Laney. I know that under your (and our current president's) watch over the Texas Transportation Commission and the State of Texas in general, the Dallas DART system handsomely grew its "rail alternatives" while still – and even to this day – asking its riders for only ten cents on the dollar of real system cost, making it practically the most heavily subsidized metropolitan transportation system in the country. I know there's a massive Dallas "High Five" freeway interchange, still under construction, which will probably bear your name when it is done. I know you got a lot of credit for wrestling

\$700 million a year for Texas roads from Washington by overcoming clean air mandates which, giving you the benefit of the doubt, may have been way too strict for circumstances in the first place. I know that it costs \$10 to ride Amtrak from Dallas to Fort Worth, and ten cents a mile to San Antonio at “peak fare” with no discounts (one third of the 30 cents a mile Amtrak will soon charge Philadelphia commuters at “50% off”), and that the day before the federally-chartered national railroad known as Amtrak, of which you are the Chairman of the Board, began its attempt to destroy the small commuting communities it had nurtured and built up over the course of decades, you were busy presenting Texas with a twenty-year plan to fund, build, and maintain its highways.

I also know that for the price of the yearly commuter *fare increase alone* which your Amtrak levied on Philadelphia’s commuters on September 9, 11 Texas commuters could ride the rails and the buses to their hearts’ content, from Plano to Dallas to Fort Worth and beyond, for an entire year. I know, as well, that when Amtrak completes its final phase of the fare increase announced on September 9, a single Philadelphia-to-New York commuter’s after-tax, unsubsidized tickets, discounted to 50% of “peak fare” on Amtrak (for which Amtrak alternately seeks the public’s pity and receives its most ignorant political scorn), would buy all the tickets that 30 commuters in Dallas could ever possibly use. I’m very much impressed by how well Texas takes care of its commuting citizens, and I’m sure you deserve much of the credit.

The interim terms of appointment of Messrs. Hall and Sosa have now expired. Mr. Mineta, the only other current legal member of the Board, apparently never attends an Amtrak Board meeting and lets the Transportation Department’s lead lawyer, with less than two years’ worth of part-time duty on Amtrak supervision, do the talking and voting for him anyhow. You removed Amtrak’s president, and are now reportedly looking for a new one with more “vision.” I presume this means that, at least for now, the buck stops with you. We should meet and talk.

By way of personal introduction, just as you try to be a good Texan by fighting for Texas roads, I try to be a good Pennsylvanian by fighting for Pennsylvania’s only really practical commuting route to New York City at this time, affordable Amtrak service on the Northeast Corridor. Perhaps someday such service could be provided by another rail carrier, but for now, Amtrak is the only game in town. I suspect that deep down, we are both on the same side in fighting for a good national passenger rail system, although we may disagree, of course, on exactly how to achieve it. I, for instance, have grave reservations about your level of comprehension of Northeast Corridor rail issues, given the abominable, dishonest behavior Amtrak has exhibited towards its commuters on your watch, and the fact that it appears to have largely emanated, most likely due to detached disinterest and lack of concern, from Board decisions that favor bean counting over honesty and values. I believe that the unfortunate recent Amtrak decisions were made in ignorance rather than venality. I’ve ridden six times around the earth on the Northeast Corridor, and I’m not yet comfortable that any decision you make about whether to split off a Corridor subsidiary and start to privatize will be made on any firmer ground than the decision to destroy the commuters because they are insignificant in numbers, an

annoyance to your bookkeepers, out of sight, and out of mind. Amtrak suffers from a severe case of Union-Station-itis.

I am not a “flaming liberal.” I doubt the wisdom of many federal subsidy programs. And I detest pork barrel politics and do not wish to be seen as promoting unnecessary subsidies and pork. I am a former Republican, recently (1998) declared an Independent, who strongly agrees with John Eisenhower’s declaration in 2004, “The fact is that today’s ‘Republican’ Party is one with which I am totally unfamiliar.” I would like to see the honor and responsible conservative behavior of several decades ago restored to the party, but for right now I would settle for just not being ashamed of what the party of my parents and of my youth is doing, in dishonor, to the Amtrak commuters.

Had Amtrak wished to actually *solve* the problem of preventing SRO conditions from happening on congested rush hour trains with monthly pass riders aboard instead of ignoring its moral obligations, throwing commuters off the trains, and giving up, I believe it could easily enough have grafted a day-of-travel credit-card-swipe system onto its ticket machines that would have been considerably more acceptable to Philadelphia commuters than buying a car and driving 100 miles round trip to New Jersey to reach an affordable train (see the enclosed “*Profiles in Pain*”), which at least one Philadelphian who wrote to me found to be less expensive than riding post-increase Amtrak. We need to talk.

By profession, I program computers and sometimes write books. I’m guessing my next one will be about Amtrak. You can look me up under author “Rick Booth” on www.amazon.com to see what I’ve written on high performance computing. I specialize in getting maximum performance out of complex computer systems, and am regarded as somewhat of an expert in that field, if not a force of nature. I find the prospect of using some of my talents to help comprehend and tune up the railroad absolutely fascinating, as I’ve spent more than enough years slamming bits and bytes around in relative obscurity. I’d love to better understand the complex, interconnected systems that make a railroad either flourish or fail, all the way from flange wear on curved track to the politics of carrying vegetables around instead of people, as Representative Knollenberg would have the railroad do.

The first thing that David Gunn did the day he apologized and gave me back my station was to give me a copy of the Amtrak press release, issued minutes earlier at his request, which placed the commuter fare increase announced on September 9 on indefinite hold. The increase was reinstated on September 27, five days after the September 22 Amtrak Board meeting which you led. To better understand what happened to the commuters at that meeting, I have sent copies of this letter to the other members of the Amtrak Board of Directors, as it was constituted on September 22, 2005, and requested meetings with each of them as well. As a placeholder and indicator of the upbeat style I would generally prefer to display on www.understandingamtrak.com, I put a nice softball starter page up on Christmas Eve. I’m a little behind, but I hope to put up two or three other softball topical pages on that website this month as well. I’m hoping that my hoped-for

discussions with you and the other Board members will give me even more material with which to praise Amtrak rather than criticize it.

Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, I was able to monitor all the rush hour Amtrak trains leaving Philadelphia for New York City this morning. Only one commuter train at 6:55 a.m. was sold out for coach class seats, and there were still business class seats available. The sell-out happened sometime after midnight, probably within the hour before departure, and whoever couldn't get a ticket for the 6:55 probably did one of three things:

- 1) Wait 25 minutes for the next train.
- 2) Pay Amtrak \$41 more for an upgrade to business class and take the same train.
- 3) Pay Amtrak \$53 more and take the slightly earlier Acela at 6:35.

There were no ticket sell-outs at all on the rush hour return trains from New York.

Today is typical of what I saw in December as well, evidence that commuters currently help fill trains and make money for Amtrak. Though capacity is getting tight, there is still room for us to stay on board – if only until an alternate, lower-cost carrier, perhaps no longer bearing the Amtrak logo, takes the place of the Philly-to-New York job trains.

As a final gesture of good faith, if you will consider helping the youngsters and sobbing grandmas who ride the rails from Philly, I will gladly offer, in exchange, myself and my services one day a month to Amtrak in Washington, or wherever else I can go to learn and understand and communicate and help, plus many more hours of study and work throughout the year. I've traveled six times around the earth on the Northeast Corridor, and I'm offering to travel anywhere in the continental U.S. to meet with you, though I would suggest Washington, New York City, or Philadelphia. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Rick Booth

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