



October 6, 2022

Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President & CEO Gardner:

The undersigned Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) Transportation Task Force Co-Chairs write to comment on the meeting held on July 21, 2022 at the Marriott Marque Hotel in Washington, D.C. CCD is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for Federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society free from racism, ableism, sexism, and xenophobia, as well as LGBTQ+ based discrimination and religious intolerance.

We appreciated receiving updates on Amtrak's latest activities to ensure its services and facilities are accessible. However, our organizations were disappointed that the meeting was less interactive with the Board than anticipated. Additionally, concerns remain that were not addressed. We request a new meeting with the Amtrak Board and leadership to act as a catalyst to spur further conversation.

Disability advocates believed the July meeting would serve as an opportunity to bring the Amtrak Board together with advocates to have a real conversation about issues experienced by passengers with disabilities. The disability community does have the opportunity to speak with Amtrak leadership on a quarterly basis, but those meetings do not involve the Board members. As a result, many advocates thought the July 21st meeting was going to offer a rare opportunity to speak directly to the individual Board members. A majority of the time, Amtrak just displayed the year's progress. Most of the information provided was previously conveyed through the regularly scheduled, quarterly meetings. Our community hoped to meet each individual Board member and learn about their work. In turn, we hoped to introduce each advocate to personalize the advocacy that is being done. In other words, instead of a presentation by Amtrak leadership, we preferred a relationship building opportunity that could lead to future collaboration. As a result, we request a new Board meeting to fulfill the expected goal.

We were also excited to learn about employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The unemployment rate for Americans with disabilities is extremely high. We appreciate when entities set-up programs to encourage hiring employees with disabilities and make the process to request reasonable accommodations easier. We always appreciate when companies push for more diversity and inclusion in hiring practices. Amtrak President Roger Harris introduced

himself at the meeting and warmly invited all of our organizations to reach out. We will do so in the future. In response to this presentation, we hoped to learn more about the actual number of disabled employees currently at Amtrak and their employment levels.

Unfortunately, such promises do not always pan out in actual numbers, or hired people with disabilities often remain in stagnant, lower-level jobs. We request additional information regarding how diversity in employment goals are progressing at Amtrak. This should be a topic discussed at the rescheduled Board meeting.

In addition, we request the rescheduled Board meeting to discuss the communities concerns regarding the need for 32-inch wide aisles in the new trainsets. For wheelchair users to have full and equal access to Amtrak services, they must have the ability to fully traverse the entire train. If trains are designed with 24-inch wide aisles, such individuals will be prevented from leaving the designated accessible spots. In addition to not being able to move up and down the train for comfort purposes, wheelchair users would not be able to safely and quickly vacate their locations to evacuate the train in the event of an emergency. We previously asked Amtrak to make all data collected on consumer preference on aisle and seat width changes public and the ability to access other records Amtrak produced to determine that an accessible aisle would require seats to be 2.5-inches narrower than those currently in use. We again request this information. Lastly, the presence of a set number of accessible seats fails to provide integration as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), emphasized by the 1999 Supreme Court ruling of *Olmstead v. L.C.*

Thank you for listening to our concerns about the July 21, 2022, Board meeting. Please promptly respond to schedule a new meeting with the Board members by reaching out to Claire Stanley at Claire.stanley@ndrn.org.

Sincerely,

Claire Stanley
National Disability Rights Network

Swatha Nandhakumar
American Council of the Blind

Carol Tyson
Disability Rights & Education & Defense Fund

CC: Chairman Anthony Coscia, President Roger Harris, VP David Handera, Amtrak Board