

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0103

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COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT & PUBLIC WORKS

March 30, 2021

William Flynn
CEO
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20001

James Squires
Chairman, President & CEO
Norfolk Southern
1200 Peachtree Street, N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30309

James Foote
President and CEO
CSX Corporation
500 Water Street, 15th Floor
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Martin Oberman
Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20423

Dear Mr. Flynn, Mr. Foote, Mr. Squires, and Mr. Oberman:

I write in regard to recent efforts to initiate new passenger rail service in the Gulf Coast. Prior to 2005, passenger rail service ran from Louisiana to Florida, with stops in Alabama and Mississippi. However, since Hurricane Katrina, Amtrak discontinued the service through Mobile.

In recent years, ongoing discussions have occurred about the possibility of new passenger rail service in the Gulf Coast through a line connecting New Orleans, Louisiana, to Mobile, Alabama, with stops in Mississippi. As proposals were presented, multiple entities – such as freight operators, the Alabama State Port Authority, several of the Port of Mobile’s customers, and local government officials – voiced concern about the potential effect that passenger rail service could have on economic growth and commerce in the region.

To alleviate such concerns, Amtrak, in cooperation with CSX and Norfolk Southern, agreed to conduct a study to determine how passenger rail service would affect freight operation in Mobile. The study and the supplemental engineering and cost analysis was scheduled to be completed prior to the start of any service. Additionally, although Mississippi and Louisiana dedicated state funding for the project, Alabama’s commitment of funds was contingent on the completion of the study.

The completion of a comprehensive study prior to initiating passenger rail service is not unique to the Gulf Coast line. It is my understanding that there is a well-established process recognized by Amtrak and the freight industries whenever passenger rail service is introduced on freight rail lines. Notably, that process has included the completion of a data-driven study identifying what additional infrastructure is necessary to prevent any potential impact on existing freight rail operation.

Last month, Amtrak announced that it planned to begin passenger rail service from New Orleans to Mobile starting in January 2022. Amtrak also announced that it had no plans to complete the ongoing study, which included the route's impact on Mobile.

I believe that initiating new Gulf Coast passenger rail service should be guided by the best available data and information. As one of the largest growing seaports in the United States, the Port of Mobile serves as an essential economic driver for the state of Alabama and region. To date, the Alabama Port Authority's annual economic value contributions total over 150,000 jobs and \$25.4 billion. Since 2005, when passenger rail service was last active, the Port of Mobile has experienced significant growth that has led to increased economic development and investments in the area.

As such, prior to establishing passenger rail service in Mobile, I believe it is essential that a comprehensive analysis be completed that definitively determines the impact such service would have on existing freight rail service and the Port of Mobile. It is my hope that all parties involved can come to an amicable solution to ensure the study is completed. If I can be of further reference, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Shelby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Richard Shelby

CC: The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
The Honorable Kay Ivey, Governor, State of Alabama
The Honorable Sandy Stimpson, Mayor, City of Mobile
John Driscoll, Director and CEO, Alabama State Port Authority
Wiley Blankenship, Chairman, Southern Rail Commission