



**Testimony of John P. Tolman
Vice President & National Legislative Representative
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen
Before the House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure Hearing on
Northeast Corridor Future: Options for High Speed
Rail Development and Opportunities for Private
Sector Participation
December 13, 2012**

Good morning, Chairman Mica and Ranking Member Rahall, and Members of the Committee. My name is John Tolman and I am the Vice President and National Legislative Representative of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which is a Division of the Teamsters Rail Conference. On behalf of more than 36,000 active BLET members and over 70,000 Rail Conference members, I want to express my thanks for the opportunity to provide the Committee with our position on high-speed rail, and particularly the development of the Northeast Corridor.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Mica for his service to this committee; it is an honor to testify at your final hearing as the Chairman of the T&I Committee. I have appeared before this body on several occasions and have always enjoyed your comments and questions, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and incoming Chairman Shuster in the 113th Congress.

My remarks today will focus on some of my personal experience as a locomotive engineer on Amtrak as well as my Organization's position on the progress Amtrak has made on the Northeast Corridor.

I will give some comparisons with other countries' passenger rail and high-speed service as they relate to privatization. Finally, I will conclude by talking about Amtrak and passenger rail successes on the Northeast Corridor and some added cost savings information about high-speed rail travel when compared with other modes of travel.

Personal Experience

I would like to first talk to you about my personal experience as an Amtrak Engineer.

I was an Amtrak engineer operating trains in the Northeast Corridor from the mid-1970s to early 1990s. From its inception, I remember Amtrak being chronically under-funded.

I also remember coming down here to lobby as a young man some two decades ago to try to secure funding to preserve safe and reliable rail passenger service and to save the jobs of my fellow professional and highly skilled workers. Now, more than 20 years later, I am still fighting that fight.

I remember running a train from New Haven, Connecticut, to Boston in a blinding snow blizzard, working with the most professional train dispatchers, trainmen and track maintenance professionals to get the riders to their destinations as safely and

efficiently as possible. Thanks to a real team effort, we were a little late but all were safe.

I remember running test trains at 150 mph with a SD 40 diesel locomotive that was close to 20 years old and passenger cars that were 30 years old. I witnessed the growth and improvements in Northeast Corridor service when the railroad electrified the diesel-powered main line, and extended the crossovers for high-speed trains.

And while Positive Train Control has made national headlines over the past few years, the fact of the matter is that Amtrak has had PTC in the NEC for over 20 years. In spite of the lack of consistent funding, Amtrak has been constantly trying to provide the best and safest service possible, testing the tracks, people and equipment to do better despite all the obstacles placed in front of them, never knowing if they would be funded or at what level.

Brief History

The Interstate Highway System was authorized by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. It had been lobbied for by major U.S. automobile manufacturers and championed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Since then, we have spent billions building and maintaining one of the best highway systems in the world. The Interstate Highway system cost \$114 billion and took 35 years to complete.

In today's dollars, that same system would cost \$426 billion to build.

But times have changed. In 1955, there were 65 million vehicles on U.S. highways. Today, there are over 250 million. It is projected that by the year 2055, there will be at least 400 million vehicles on our highway system, further wearing out a system that is already in a terrible — and in some places hazardous — state of disrepair.

Congestion on our nation's roadways is at historic levels and will only get worse as our population continues to grow. It is projected that by the year 2020, 90% of urban interstates will either be at or over capacity.

Between 1995 and 2001, commute times over the same distance on U.S. highways increased 10%.

The Texas Transportation Institute estimates that \$63 billion was wasted due to traffic congestion because of time lost and fuel used in 2005 alone.

Passenger miles on highways also increased 18.1% between 1997 and 2004. Anyone who has flown recently knows that serious problems also plague our nation's airports — flight delays and cancellations, lost luggage, overcrowded planes. Only 82% of commercial flights were on time in February 2009 and most of these delays occurred because of overcrowded airspace along the East Coast.

Comparing Countries

When you compare the level of government funding provided to Amtrak with that provided to domestic aviation and highways, and to many European and Asian countries, it frankly is embarrassing. As APTA¹ has pointed out:

“As to the French TGV and the Japanese Shinkansen, there have been many valuable lessons learned from which the United States will benefit as we go forward. The most important of these lessons that the critics acknowledge but refuse to accept is that passenger trains, if allowed to compete in an even environment with other modes, can cover their costs and in some instances even turn a profit.”

It is clear that in other parts of the world, privatization of high speed and passenger rail comes with many problems that privatization itself portends to solve. However, systemic safety and reliability problems have led to reversals that caused much upheaval in transportation systems in Great Britain and New Zealand, who were forced to re-nationalize their systems. But there is one factor that undeniably common to all these experiences: funding cuts are the precursor to privatization schemes.

High Speed Rail Profits and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor

Profitability is always a factor in structuring investments in high-speed rail. An APTA report from July 2012 showed that continuing high-speed passenger rail in-

¹ American Public Transportation Association.

vestments will generate \$24.6 billion in net economic benefits over the next forty years.²

In fact, Amtrak is more than competitive with airlines in the Northeast Corridor on routes from Washington, D.C. to New York — where it has a significant majority of the market — and from New York to my home town in Boston. Indeed, the growth in Northeast Corridor ridership since Amtrak's inception is an achievement of which any transportation carrier would be proud.

For example, in New York to Boston route alone, market share has *more than doubled* since Amtrak introduced high-speed electrified service in 2000.

Amtrak Compared to Other Modes of travel

Amtrak now carries more riders on this route than all of the airlines put together. And between Washington, D.C. and New York City, Amtrak carries *more than twice as many passengers* than all of the airlines combined. Since introducing its Acela service, Amtrak has almost *tripled* its air/rail market share on the NEC, and today carries 75% of intercity travelers between New York and Washington.³

Besides being in head-to-head competition, we agree with Amtrak that high speed rail and airlines also complement one another in providing safe, fast and efficient travel to the public.⁴ And this hybrid interaction is not limited to comparing rail travel with air travel.

These same benefits also apply to automobile travel. The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) notes that a diversion of intercity automobile traffic to rail would have a dramatic impact on the ability of states and localities to maintain their roadways, and also would significantly alleviate roadway congestion. This will be a critical factor in determining where to make future investments on upgrades to our transportation infrastructure.

² “Opportunity Cost of Inaction High Speed Rail and High Performance Passenger Rail in the United States: <http://www.apta.com/resources/reportsandpublications/documents/HPPR-Cost-of-Inaction.pdf>

³ Amtrak, “State-Supported Corridor Trains, FY2011-2012,” April 2012.

⁴ Amtrak NEC Briefing.

Some fifteen years ago DOT estimated the savings just from reduced highway delays range from \$489 million to \$2.9 billion annually, depending on the corridor. Those are savings that would be forgone without appropriate investment in high-speed passenger rail.⁵ Another advantage to the nation, as a whole, is the fact that our trains consume 20% less energy per passenger mile than airlines and 30% less than automobiles. In other words, investment in high-speed passenger rail service is a key element in promoting energy independence and reduced emissions in America.

We think that Amtrak's long-term plan for the Northeast Corridor provides a template for a public/private partnership that is worth discussing. And we believe that a partnership that does not subordinate the public interest — or the interests of BLET and Teamsters Rail Conference members — to private investment goals will both improve service and provide the traveling public with greater transportation choices for decades to come.

The BLET will continue to seek opportunities to work with this Committee and federal agencies on legislative and regulatory priorities that strengthen passenger and high-speed rail, including Amtrak, as a normal course of our activity. Once again, I thank Chairman Mica and Ranking Member Rahall and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

⁵ High Speed Ground Transportation for America," U.S. Department of Transportation, September 1997.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Truth in Testimony Disclosure

Pursuant to clause 2(g)(5) of House Rule XI, in the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include: (1) a curriculum vitae; and (2) a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. Such statements, with appropriate redaction to protect the privacy of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness appears.

(1) Name:
John Tolman

(2) Other than yourself, name of entity you are representing:
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen

(3) Are you testifying on behalf of an entity other than a Government (federal, state, local) entity?

YES

If yes, please provide the information requested below and attach your curriculum vitae.

NO

(4) Please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by you or by the entity you are representing:

n/a



Signature

12/10/12
Date

John P. Tolman

WORK HISTORY

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, founded in 1863, is North America's oldest existing labor organization. On January 1, 2004, a merger between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the 1.4-million member International Brotherhood of Teamsters took effect, and the BLET became the founding member of the Teamsters Rail Conference.

Vice President & National Legislative Representative **2006-present**

Elected to represent the national union in all legislative, political and regulatory areas. Testified before several Congressional Committees and Regulatory agencies on numerous occasions regarding legislative and safety issues.

Legislative & Political Director **2004-2006**

Represented the national union in legislative and political issues in Washington, D.C.

Chief of Staff **2001-2006**

Served as the organization's Chief of Staff in the National Headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. Supervised all staff members and coordinated departmental activities under the National President. Involved in negotiations; research; political, legislative and regulatory issues as assigned.

Special Representative **1996-2001**

Served as Coordinator of Education & Training; Coordinator of Safety Task Force, working with the National Transportation Safety Board on accident investigations; researching issues; and troubleshooting for the BLET in various geographical areas.

Massachusetts State Legislative Board Chairman **1992-1996**

Elected to represent BLE members in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, regarding legislative and political issues.

Locomotive Engineer **1974-1996**

Served as a locomotive engineer for New York Central Railroad, Penn Central Railroad, Conrail, MBTA, MBCR, Boston & Maine Railroad and Amtrak operating trains in accordance with Federal Railroad Administration regulatory requirements and Railroad operating rules.

Locomotive Fireman **1971-1974**

Hired as a locomotive fireman by the New York Central Railroad.

Alderman

Melrose, Massachusetts

1996-1997

Elected to an At-Large position, Chairman of the Finance Committee

Chairman, Melrose Democratic Committee

1993-1996

World of Health

Owner/Vice President of Operations

1993-1995

EDUCATION

Anna Maria College, Paxton, Massachusetts

Masters Degree in Business Administration

Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts

Bachelor of Arts degree in Marketing, with a concentration in Transportation