



August 26, 2019

Mr. Peter Wilander  
Vice President, Product Development & Customer Experience  
Amtrak  
1 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Wilander:

I'm writing today on behalf of our thousands of members nationwide who are highly troubled about the introduction of the Contemporary Dining model on all long-distance trains east of the Mississippi.

As you know from our prior conversations, *Rail Passengers* understands the constraints under which Amtrak operates – both legal and fiscal – and we want very much to be good partners in fighting for the best passenger-rail service possible. But we have also shared with you in detail our disappointment in the Contemporary product as it was executed on the Lake Shore and Capitol Limited lines. Apart from the introduction of a hot food item we don't see our concerns reflected in the service as constituted today.

This is why advancing with an expansion of this model is so troubling to our Members: it appears Amtrak is simply barreling ahead with an offering that remains flawed and potentially threatens the attractiveness of the trains without substantively addressing the shortcomings we identified.

Among the issues we have discussed:

- No purchase option for coach passengers (combined with limited Café Car alternatives)
- Insufficient quantities and choices loaded aboard the train, with many items unavailable
- Insufficient hot-food options
- Insufficient kosher choices
- Perfunctory breakfast choices
- Indifferent on-board service and presentation
- Large quantities of trash waste (the box, the bag, the plasticware, etc.)
- Presentation and plating

As we have said before, *Rail Passengers* welcomes the move toward a more flexible dining service, with more choice for passengers -- choice about what to eat, where to eat, and when to eat it -- but we think the Capitol and Lake Shore experience needs more improvement before going out to more

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routes. We also understand the need to make lighter fare available to match the tastes of many modern travelers. In fact, we have had feedback from some Members who prefer the new food items for taste. But as currently executed on the Capitol and the Lake Shore, too often food items run short, there aren't enough hot options, and the presentation is perfunctory and off-putting. Moreover, coach passengers are completely excluded.

Among the open questions that our Members would like answered:

- 1) Are any elements of the Eastern trains dining plans open to refinement before launch in October?
- 2) How will the new dining cars – purchased and approved with taxpayer dollars to serve as dining cars – be utilized in this new service model?
- 3) What plans exist to address shortfalls in items aboard the trains and options for those with special needs (kosher, vegetarian, allergies, etc.)?
- 4) What is the status of food-service equipment upgrades that were contemplated to improve the taste and appearance of dining-car food?
- 5) What are Amtrak's plans for dining changes on the Western trains, i.e., National Network trains such as the Empire Builder, California Zephyr, Southwest Chief, Coast Starlight and Sunset Limited?

As always, we remain available to work collaboratively with your team to find solutions that recognize the constraints the Food & Beverage team faces while ensuring that all passengers have access to tasty, nutritious and attractive food and drink during long journeys. Whether through our newly reconstituted Advisory process or the ad hoc groups we have already convened, *Rail Passengers* can supply the Voice of the Passenger as you execute these changes or contemplate more. We think it's important that those voices are heard.

Sincerely,

Jim Mathews  
President and CEO

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