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February 7, 2022
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To the Members of the Surface Transportation Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Amtrak and the Gulf States to re-establish passenger rail along a portion of the coast along the Gulf of Mexico.

To get to the point, your decision can and should set precedent for similar rail corridors in states across our nation, including Ohio and the Great Lakes region who are either currently served by Amtrak or are planning to work with Amtrak on expanded service. In Ohio, a major and long hoped for corridor is one that runs from Cleveland to Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati, known as the "3C&D" Corridor.

Two major freight railroads, Norfolk Southern and CSX, each own and operate half of the corridor, which hasn't seen passenger rail service since the early 1970's, despite the fact it was and still is the most densely populated and heavily traveled corridor in the state. There are at least two other corridors, one in the planning stage that could positively impact Ohioan ability to connect with jobs, education, health care and more. The revival and development of passenger rail also improves the state and the regional ability to connect business with a larger, skilled workforce.

I understand this both as Executive Director of All Aboard Ohio and as a former employee of the Ohio Rail Development Commission. Rail, both freight and passenger, helps grow business and jobs and created a more connected economy.

But it seems, in the case now before you, that CSX is telling shippers and businesses along the Gulf that the presence of passenger trains in this rail corridor would hurt their business. One could argue that the freight railroads have harmed both shippers and our nation's supply chain already with their policy of "precision railroading".

The fact is that the presence of passenger rail, especially along short-haul rail corridors have a history of attracting more development of both business and jobs to the communities that host station stops and the area around those stops. We've seen this in states as diverse as California, Michigan, Virginia, North Carolina and Maine. Ohio and the Great Lakes region would like to experience some of that growth and the other benefits of connectivity.

Granting CSX the ability to block passenger rail along the Gulf Coast Corridor would stifle that future.

For this reason, we urge you find in favor of Amtrak and the people of the Gulf Coast.

Sincerely,

Stuart F. Nicholson / Executive Director / All Aboard Ohio