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February 17, 2025

Surface Transportation Board
Att: Docket # EP 774 (Sub-N0. 1)
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

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Office of Proceedings
February 18, 2025
Part of
Public Record

Nomination for Representative from a state that provides funding for passenger rail on the STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee

Please accept this letter as my application for appointment to the currently vacant seat on the STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee as representative from a state (Vermont) which provides funding for passenger rail. I believe my relevant experience matches this category. I affirm I am willing to serve as a member of the PRAC and to serve in a Representative capacity thereon.

In my professional career, I spent 33 years full-time as a businessman, selling travel by rail and have continued to advocate for improved rail service since my retirement. I have traveled over 350,000 miles by train in my lifetime, both in the U.S. and abroad.

I remain very active in passenger rail advocacy and development. I have been a member of the official Rail Advisory Council of the Vermont Department of Transportation since 2000, serving under four administrations, both Democrat and Republican.

I advised on service design for potential new rail services in Vermont beginning in the 1990s. In 1995, when Amtrak discontinued the overnight "Montrealer" through Vermont, I submitted a proposal to Governor Howard Dean's administration for a less expensive daylight train, the "Vermont". My proposed schedule was accepted and implemented by Amtrak and the Vermont Department of Transportation. In Amtrak's Fiscal Year 2023, "Vermont"

ridership exceeded 100,000, an all-time record. I also worked with the Rail Council to extend a second Vermont Amtrak route. The “Ethan Allen Express” restored rail service (lost in 1953) from New York City to Rutland VT in 1996 and was extended to Burlington VT in 2022. It too had record ridership in FY2023. Both trains continued to grow their ridership in FY24 as well.

From 1983 to 2016 I developed and managed a specialty niche travel service, Rail Travel Center/Rail Travel Adventures, selling individual and group travel by train worldwide, with a focus on Amtrak. I created and operated this program and operated it from 1983-2010 while employed by Travel Center Inc., first as General Manager, then as Vice President. I assumed ownership and the Presidency in 2010 until my 2016 retirement.

In addition to the direct sale of train travel, I organized and frequently led our worldwide escorted tours. These took guests over the longer distances by train, with multimodal transportation used for destination sightseeing. Central to our advertising, for over 30 years I wrote a 24 to 72-page catalog “The Rail Travel Press”, issued four times annually to market our rail tours. Later in our history we added a web presence to our marketing plan. Our company won Amtrak’s Golden Spike Award for outstanding sales for over a decade until Amtrak cancelled this award program.

I worked closely with Amtrak on individual and group reservations, space allocation and promotion, and with rail carriers abroad for our international trips. In the 1990s I served as a member of Amtrak’s Travel Industry Automation Committee. I became aware of how inadequate funding crippled the full potential for Amtrak ridership. We invariably had more passenger demand than Amtrak’s available capacity, especially in sleeping cars on the long-distance trains.

I have direct experience with VIA Rail Canada, the Alaska Railroad, the Rocky Mountaineer, Swiss Rail, Rail Europe, British Rail, South African rail, Australia and New Zealand rail and railways in China. In 1989, I testified to the Transportation Committee of the Canadian House of Commons on the importance of supporting VIA Rail Canada for overall tourism to Canada.

I am familiar with current and past rail equipment worldwide and understand the need to meet multiple market demands on a single train. I could be helpful in advising on new equipment design and on the best use of current assets. I have seen and experienced the best and worst in passenger rail for decades, both here and overseas.

After over 30 years working with the motor coach industry booking tour charters, I understand the need to better coordinate rail and motor coach services. This is common overseas, but only exists in a few regions here. In too few states "Amtrak Thruway" buses extend the reach of regional Amtrak trains, with strong mutual ridership. I support additional multi-modal services, including joint tickets and a return to printed schedules to better explain options to prospective riders. We need an on-line "hub" for booking all surface travel and for rail and motor coach services to connect at the same stations.

I have been an active member of the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) for 50 years, serving on its membership Council, Board, and as a Vice Chair from 2018-2020. I also am a member of numerous regional passenger rail groups. However, I am not seeking an "Advocacy" seat. My focus is on the business relationships and direct operations of passenger rail.

Financial responsibility is important in any business, but with U. S. rail we need a more optimistic and opportunity driven focus, emphasizing on-board service and ridership growth. My business experience supports those views. Amtrak has largely dropped route-specific marketing and travel industry outreach. This needs to be resumed, especially with new Amtrak equipment being built. The STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee can play an extremely useful role here. Despite past challenges, the history of passenger rail in the USA is one of great possibilities. This committee can provide the knowledge and impetus to achieve these advances.

I appreciate the opportunity to make this application. Work examples and references can be sent on request.

Yours truly,
/S/ Carl H. Fowler
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