



VIA E- FILING

The Honorable Ann D. Begeman
Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

The Honorable Patrick J. Fuchs
Vice Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423 247495

The Honorable Martin J. Oberman
Member
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
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Public Record

April 8, 2019

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 36025: Texas Central Railroad and Infrastructure, Inc., & Texas Central Railroad, LLC – Authority to Construct and Operate – Petition For Exemption From 49 U.S.C. S 10901 And Subtitle IV – Passenger Rail Line Between Dallas, TX And Houston, TX

Dear Chairman Begeman, Vice Chairman Fuchs and Member Oberman:

The Rail Passengers Association/NARP writes to share the support of our tens of thousands of members nationwide in the above-named matter for the Petition to Reopen filed by Texas Central Railroad and Infrastructure, Inc., and Texas Central Railroad, LLC.

Rail Passengers continues to believe that the Texas Central initiative is an important demonstration of the role private capital can and must play in building our nation's new transportation economy and is thus an important private project of national significance. Further, we believe that because the Board's decision in this matter will set an important precedent for high-speed rail projects nationwide, the interests of the traveling public are best served with an open oral hearing to permit detailed examination and questions by the Board.

Rail Passengers asserts that last year's through-ticketing agreement with Amtrak not only responds to the Board's direction in its 2016 jurisdiction decision, but substantially alters the factual basis for any determination. Despite the lack of a physical connection between TCR and Amtrak stations, the distances between them are not unusual when compared with other first-mile/last-mile connections observed throughout the U.S. – Americans routinely travel dozens of miles on various modes to reach airports, cruise ports and other travel entry points, and connecting between TCR and Amtrak facilities will be considerably easier and quicker than travel distances for other modes.

Rather, the most important consideration is the degree to which the through-ticketing agreement, and the relatively close proximity of the services, stimulates new travel and through-travel on the rest of the nation's interstate passenger rail system, and here Rail Passengers believes there is a compelling argument. Last year's through-ticketing agreement meaningfully and powerfully affects the entire U.S. interstate rail network by linking Houston and Dallas passengers to some 13,958 Amtrak route miles and creating the opportunity for any one of 12,256 individual journeys combining TCR and Amtrak travel on a single ticket.

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Building single-ticket connections between the proposed Houston-Dallas route and the rest of the Amtrak National Network will permit northbound travelers in Houston to buy a single fare to ride TCR's train and connect with Amtrak's *Texas Eagle*, or with the *Heartland Flyer* via the *Eagle*. The Houston TCR passenger would thus enjoy single-fare access to any one of 4,753 different journeys on the combined Amtrak-TCR network—access to 5,662 route miles of Amtrak service. Southbound travelers can reach any one of the *Sunset Limited's* 22 destinations or even connect to Amtrak's *City of New Orleans* or *Crescent* services, opening up 7,503 potential journeys along 8,296 Amtrak route miles.

Many of these journeys will be trips that might not otherwise have occurred using other modes, with the direct link between the two cities bypassing a major flaw in Amtrak's existing long-distance network as it is currently configured—many connections must today flow through Chicago, a major impediment to travelers in the South and West.

New travel always means new consumer spending, injecting life into economies all along the routes served. Northbound TCR travelers could visit any one of 97 U.S. destinations, while southbound TCR passengers could visit any one of 122, all while buying a single fare either through TCR's ticketing system or Amtrak's.

The Texas Central project would be exciting and worthy of support even if all it did was to introduce a new high-speed rail option between the two largest metropolitan regions in Texas. But with the completion of a recent through-ticketing agreement with Amtrak, the TCR project goes well beyond creating an important new Texas service and begins the long-delayed work of bringing U.S. rail travel up to par with the rest of the developed world.

Representing some 40 million fare-paying rail passengers nationwide, Rail Passengers Association's long-term goal is to put 80% of Americans within 25 miles of a rail station within 25 years, using a combination of high-speed/high-performance, long-distance intercity rail, commuter trains, light rail, public transit and even bike share or shared scooters. This is our vision for what we call *A Connected America*, in which all U.S. entities, including public/private partnerships and private industry, invest appropriately and effectively to create a 21st century network to power the economy of the new century.

The Board's jurisdiction decision in this matter could help set the preconditions for private capital to invest in development of high-speed rail in the U.S.; likewise, the decision could also retard that development for decades to come. Thus, the traveling, taxpaying public has a compelling interest in ensuring that the Board gets the very best opportunity to examine not only the voluminous filings in this matter, but to hear from stakeholders on the very real implications of this decision for transportation policy in the U.S.

The Rail Passengers Association/NARP strongly encourages the Board to take jurisdiction over this project as an important element of the overall interstate passenger-rail system, and to expedite Board review of Texas Central's application so this exciting project can move forward and the traveling public can realize the benefits of high-performance rail without delay.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Mathews
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cc: Parties of Record

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