



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF RAIL PASSENGERS

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Information Contact: Tim Geeslin
(817) 991-5825 (Daytime)
(817) 792-3833 (Evening)

Federal Budget cuts threaten the future of Texas rail development

President Bush's proposal to cut Amtrak funding would strand Texas travelers now and for years into the future, warns the Texas Association of Rail Passengers (TXARP).

TXARP President Tim Geeslin of Arlington said trains such as the Texas Eagle, which offers daily service between San Antonio and Chicago with stopovers in Austin, Fort Worth and Dallas, could not survive without federal funding assistance. President Bush has asked Congress to slash all of Amtrak's federal funding for 2006, which could bankrupt the rail carrier and end interregional passenger service such as the Texas Eagle and Sunset Limited, he said.

Urban areas such as Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio are embracing rail service as a way to relieve congestion and air pollution, and the loss of interregional service such as the Texas Eagle could pose major problems as these communities seek to establish or expand commuter rail and to link to one another through higher speed rail corridors, Geeslin said.

Rail initiatives in the Dallas-Fort Worth, East Texas and Central Texas areas are planning to use existing rail companies' right of ways in expanding and upgrading these corridors, Geeslin said. But the railroads have already stated that because of their long association with Amtrak, they prefer not to deal with multiple entities as these plans progress.

"Amtrak cannot operate in Texas without assistance," Geeslin said. "It's no different than aviation and highway transportation - it simply takes federal and/or state funding support to operate the kind of transportation network we need."

TXARP officials have stated that transportation will soon be in crisis in the state of Texas without further development of freight and passenger rail corridors.

"Building more roads and runways alone will not solve our problems," Geeslin said. "Rail, on the other hand, is cheaper to develop than new highways, and it doesn't pollute the air the way cars and trucks do."

Rail service also connects isolated parts of Texas where air transport is either minimal or nonexistent, Geeslin pointed out.

"President Bush is looking to cut funds that provide subsidies for small city airports at the same time he wants to cut Amtrak funding," Geeslin said. "This will further isolate rural areas of our state, hindering their economic and community development efforts."

In light of these issues, TXARP is asking Texas residents to contact their elected representatives to voice support of freight and passenger rail in Texas and funding of Amtrak with reforms as outlined by U.S. Senator, Kay Bailey Hutchison's "National or Nothing" legislation introduced in the last session of Congress.

The Texas Association of Rail Passengers is a grassroots statewide organization whose members include individuals, cities, chambers of commerce, economic development corporations and convention and visitors bureaus.

To promote a balanced transportation system in Texas by improving and expanding the movement of goods and people by rail.

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