

Commission des transports et de
l'environnement

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Honorable Francois Rebello
Depute de La Prairie
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Dear Mr.Rebello:

I would like to thank you for coming to Amtrak's offices in New York City on May 21st to meet with myself as well as representatives from Amtrak's Planning, Operations, and Government Affairs Departments. I believe we all benefitted from our exchange of interests, ideas, and plans.

To recap, you expressed strong support of greatly improved rail passenger service between Montréal and points south to the US because of the mutual economic, energy, and global warming benefits derived from a modal shift from auto and air to rail. You are interested in additional improvements to conventional rail services with possible new Quebec side investments in rail infrastructure. You are also anticipating practical and efficient means to limit the travel time such as reducing the one hour waiting time at our customs/immigration inspection points. You also want to develop an overnight train service with sleeping car service to make travelling more convenient for business travel, and moreover in the near future to set up the *Adirondack* and/or *Vermont* routes for higher speed rail service. In doing so, you understand that, as a practical matter, these international improvements must involve a fair financial involvement from the Province of Quebec and/or the Canadian Federal Government if they are to go forward. the Canadian Federal Govern

Amtrak began its comments by noting its efforts to maintain the current New York State supported service, the *Adirondack*, which operates daily between New York City and Montreal. We are now working with the Canada Border Services Agency to meet their mandate for off-train examination facilities, hopefully within our current terminus of Central Station. It is our intent to secure an international agreement to also allow for pre-examination of passengers south to the US with US Customs & Border agents utilizing the same facilities in Montreal.

As the *Adirondack* is a state -supported Amtrak service, New York State is currently responsible for the costs of this examination facility. We also noted that under recent Federal Legislation titled the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, Section 209 states Amtrak, the states, and the Federal Railroad Administration must develop a standardized methodology for establishing and allocating costs (operating and capital) for state supported and corridor routes. This methodology must be developed by October 16, 2010 and may result in increased cost to New York State for both the *Adirondack* and the entire corridor from New York City to Niagara Falls. The ability of New York State to pay for this service in view of increasing costs is not without question.

We discussed the feasibility of the establishment of an overnight train from Montreal to New York City and possibly down to Washington. The former would be on the existing route of the *Adirondack*, the latter on the route of the *Vermont*, which currently operates daily service between Washington, D.C. and St. Albans, VT. The *Vermont* is also an Amtrak state-supported service as the State of Vermont provides the funding to operate this train, so any change in service would be at the state's discretion. We noted a lack of equipment, especially sleeping

cars, to operate such a service on either route. In addition, to extend the *Vermont* north of St. Albans, Vermont to Montreal would require costly upgrades to a rail bridge in Vermont and Canadian labor union support to allow the operation of the train with the American crew all the way to Montreal as is currently the case with the *Adirondack*. With regard to the reestablishment of a Montreal - Boston service it was stated that the most direct route would require the rebuilding of the line from Concord, New Hampshire to White River Jct., Vermont.

The current Montreal - New York City service will benefit from infrastructure projects now underway. A \$91.2 million High Speed Rail grant will rebuild the second track between Albany-Rensselaer and Schenectady, New York as well as improve interlocking switches. Combined, these improvements will significantly improve the reliability of service. In addition, a \$3million investment in a new passing track at Saratoga Springs, New York will also improve the on-time performance of the *Adirondack*.

The infrastructure improvements noted above, and the elimination of border examination dwell times, could reduce the current 11 hour schedule between Montreal and New York City by at least one hour and make the schedule much more dependable. With regards to your desire for an overnight train, a 10 hour schedule for an overnight train leaving Montreal at 9:30PM and arriving in New York at 7:30 appears to be possible. This service might prove to be a reliable and convenient alternative to air, bus and auto travel. However, this service option must first be subjected to rigorous marketing and cost analysis to determine the feasibility. In order for such a feasibility study to be undertaken a funding source would also have to be identified

With regard to the expansion of international conventional rail passenger services, the fundamental question remains as to which entities will pay for the required capital and operating costs. Amtrak currently does not have the financial means to either initiate or operate these new services.

Concerning high speed rail service between Montreal and New York City or Boston, all of us agreed that the financial costs are huge and funding commitments must be made. In addition, there are many questions to answer regarding which route to advance first and what the most feasible routes between the city pairs are. In short, a tremendous amount of work lies ahead in order to implement such service.

In summation, Amtrak shares a strong interest in exploring with you and Quebec Province ways that might be developed to advance the implementation of additional conventional international rail passenger service while also exploring the high speed option as well. We look forward to seeing you at the New York State High Speed Rail Summit meeting in Albany on June 14th and continuing our dialogue afterwards as well.

Sincerely,

Peter

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