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BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
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March 8, 2024

Amit Bose, Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Include Amtrak Service to Tampa Bay Area in Proposed Chicago to Miami Route

Dear Administrator Bose,

Thank you for your service to our nation and ensuring the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods. I understand that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is studying long-distance Amtrak service from Chicago, Illinois to Miami, Florida, and that an early option excluded service to Tampa. On behalf of Florida's 14th Congressional District and the growing and dynamic Tampa Bay region, I urge you to include service to Tampa, specifically Tampa Union Station, in the proposed Chicago to Miami route.

The Tampa Bay region is booming in population and economic activity, along with robust growth in the number of tourists who visit central Florida and our west coast beaches. We desperately need new and expanded services to the Midwest and other regions. Simply put, the Tampa Bay region is a top candidate for expanded Amtrak rail service and infrastructure.

The Tampa Bay region is home to more than 3 million people and is growing by leaps and bounds. From 2021 to 2022, Florida's population increased by more than 463,000 residents, or 2.1 percent, to over 22 million people. The Tampa Bay area experienced an even larger percentage of growth at 2.2 percent over the same period, moving from 3,219,514 residents to 3,290,730. According to the recent 2024 Regional Competitiveness Summary Report by the Tampa Bay Partnership, Tampa Bay is once again first in net migration compared to similar regions across the country, and is in the top five for in-migration ages 25-34 and business startup rates.^[1] The region

^[1] 2024 Regional Competitiveness Summary Report, Tampa Bay Partnership,
https://issuu.com/tampabaypartnership/docs/2024_rcr_report-digital.

is unique in that it is home to the Tampa International Airport (TPA), Port Tampa Bay, critical military operations and so much more. In FY23, TPA saw more than 22 million passengers and was ranked the 26th busiest airport nationally. As a leader in the maritime industry, Port Tampa Bay is the largest port in southeast Florida. The Port transports more than 33 million tons of cargo annually, stations four major cruise lines and contributes over \$17 billion in economic impact in Central Florida. The growing number of airline and cruise passengers demonstrates the growing volume of out-of-state-visitors. The Tampa Bay area also is the proud home of MacDill Airforce Base, U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command with more than 15,000 military personnel. These few highlights are merely a glimpse of how and why the region is growing and requires new rail connections.

While the Tampa Bay area is attractive for families, workers, and businesses, the growth is having a significant impact on our transportation infrastructure: our roads are congested, less safe, and in need of more public transit and expanded rail service. Population and economic growth and the demonstrated increase in out-of-state visitors argue strongly in favor of service to Tampa on any route from Chicago into the Sunshine State. Many Midwesterners travel and stay on the west coast of Florida after following Interstate 75 down the Gulf Coast side of Florida.

Amtrak released its Connects Us initiative in 2021, which outlines their vision to better connect communities, reduce our nation's carbon footprint and provide economic benefits for every American. The Connects Us proposal envisions intercity passenger rail corridors through Florida to connect rapidly growing Southeast business, population and tourist centers while increasing travel options through the communities along the corridors.^[2] It includes increased round trips between Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, and Miami, with Tampa Union Station as a critical piece of the Florida network. In fact, nearly 130,000 passengers went through the historic station in the last fiscal year, a 13% increase in ridership! Later this year, Tampa Union Station will undergo a \$2 million renovation with city and state funding to preserve the historic station and handle the growing influx of riders.^[3] The FRA should include the second busiest station in Florida in its Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study determination and new and expanded routes.

Expanded intercity passenger rail and improved Amtrak service to the Tampa Bay region is one of the reasons that I championed the historic Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) - the largest long-term investment in American infrastructure in nearly a century. Thank you for ensuring that the historic investments will make our nation's rail network safer, more reliable, resilient and sustainable. This includes funding for a new Corridor Identification and Development

^[2] *Amtrak Connects Us: Amtrak's Vision for Improving Transportation Across America*, Amtrak, https://media.amtrak.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Amtrak-2021-Corridor-Vision-May27_2021.pdf

^[3] *Tampa's Union Station more popular with travelers*, Bay News 9, <https://baynews9.com/fl/tampa/news/2024/01/10/tampa-s-union-station-more-popular-with-travelers-#:~:text=New%20numbers%20from%20Amtrak%20show,October%202022%20to%20September%202023.>

Program, a revamped Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program, an expanded CRISI Program, and so much more. The IIA will make life better for countless Floridians, create a generation of good-paying union jobs and economic growth, and deliver the future of American transportation Floridians deserve. Florida is a dynamic state, but our rail and transit networks need massive investment and revitalization.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to include service to the Tampa Bay region at Tampa Union Station in the proposed Chicago to Miami route to serve the traveling needs of our growing and vibrant region. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my Legislative Assistant Capreece Kelsaw at Capreece.Kelsaw@mail.house.gov. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Cc: Jane Castor, Mayor of the City of Tampa
Cc: Hillsborough Transportation Planning Organization
Cc: Tampa Bay Chamber
Cc: Tampa Bay Partnership