

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 18, 2023

Mr. Stephen J. Gardner
Chief Executive Officer
Amtrak
60 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Mr. Gardner,

We are extremely troubled by descriptions of Amtrak passengers' experiences on the Auto Train last week. These stories fit an alarming pattern of ill-preparedness in Amtrak's response to extended train delays. We write to inquire about Amtrak's policies and procedures to provide adequate care and provisions to passengers in the event of unexpected, sustained delays.

On Monday, January 11, 563 passengers on board the Auto Train—including children and the elderly—departed Lorton, Virginia, at 5:00 p.m. and were scheduled to arrive in Sanford, Florida, at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 12. However, the journey took nearly 37 hours, concluding in the early hours of Wednesday, January 13. During that time, Amtrak said it was “providing regular updates to customers, along with meals, snack packs and beverages” and “working with pet owners to provide bathroom breaks,” but passengers' accounts drastically differed.¹ Passengers on the delayed train described limited access to food, bathrooms, and medical care; they also reported feces on the train floor because dogs and their owners were not allowed to temporarily disembark.² While we understand the train was rerouted to avoid an incident on the track and that Amtrak must abide by hours of service laws, it is difficult to imagine a sufficient justification for the distressing conditions passengers described experiencing.

It is concerning that this is not the first multi-hour delay impacting the Auto Train during which passengers described dire conditions. Last January, after a severe winter storm, a northbound Auto Train's journey took about 30 hours – and passengers reported similar experiences on board: poor communication of the train's status and limited food and water.³ It is alarming that passengers are suffering the same insufficient treatment during a similar situation more than a year later.

¹ Sam Sweeney and Meredith Deliso, “Delayed Amtrak Auto Train arrives 37 hours after departure,” January 11, 2023, *ABC News*, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/passengers-stuck-amtrak-auto-train-after-freight-derailment/story?id=96348439>.

² Cheryl Teh and Hannah Getahun, “People stuck on board an Amtrak train for more than 29 hours had to be told by the conductor they were not being held hostage: report,” January 11, 2023, *Business Insider*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/amtrak-train-delay-passengers-stuck-for-hours-2023-1>; Danielle Wallace, “Amtrak train in South Carolina stalled for 20 hours, conductor tells riders who dial 911 they're not 'hostage,’” January 11, 2023, *FOXBusiness*, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/amtrak-train-south-carolina-stalled-20-hours-conductor-tells-riders-dial-911-theyre-not-hostage>.

³ Justin George, “Winter storm leaves Amtrak passengers stuck on trains for days,” January 5, 2022, *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/01/05/amtrak-train-winter-storm/>.

In order to better understand Amtrak’s policies and procedures for passenger care and compensation, we respectfully request a written answer to the following questions by January 31, 2023:

1. What are Amtrak’s passenger care policies and procedures in the event of sustained and unexpected delays? Please include food and beverage provision, bathroom access and maintenance protocols, access to medical care, and train ingress and egress opportunities in your answer.
2. Were these policies revisited after the January 2022 Auto Train delay? If so, what changes were made not; if not, please explain why not.
3. What sort of policy changes will Amtrak implement to improve operations and prevent insufficient passenger treatment during delays going forward?
4. We understand the delayed train stopped multiple times to replenish food and water supplies.⁴ When sustained delays occur, does Amtrak give passengers the opportunity to safely disembark the train and arrange alternate methods of transportation?
5. We appreciate Amtrak’s commitment to provide fare refunds to each customer.⁵ Will Amtrak be providing: (i) full refunds to each customer, regardless of the type of ticket booked; (ii) refunds in the form of the original payment; and (iii) refunds for any upgrades, vehicles, pets, or other comparable fees paid for by a passenger? If not for any of the above, please explain why not.

Thank you for your attention this important matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Amtrak has robust, humane policies in place to ensure proper passenger treatment during extended delays.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



MARIA CANTWELL
United States Senate



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate

⁴ Michael Levenson, “‘Train Ride From Hell’: 17-Hour Amtrak Trip Becomes 37-Hour Ordeal,” January 11, 2023, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/us/amtrak-delayed-va-fl.html>.

⁵ Wallace, “Amtrak train.”