

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

May 16, 2018

Mr. Richard Anderson
President and CEO
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Anderson,

I write to you to voice my strong objections over Amtrak's decision to remove its ticket agent from the station in Charleston, West Virginia, effective June 6, 2018. This decision will not only deprive the state of West Virginia of its last Amtrak ticket agent, but the lack of the agent's presence at the Charleston station will compromise safety and upkeep at the facility and make access more difficult for potential customers. I have serious concerns about Amtrak's criteria for making this critical decision and am urging you to postpone any final decision on this matter until we can agree on the fundamental facts such as how ticket sales and daily ridership are calculated.

It's my understanding that Amtrak based these staffing decisions on average daily ridership, but failed to account for the number of days that service is actually provided. For example, last year, Charleston had 9,749 total riders according to the Rail Passenger Association. That equates to roughly 62 riders each time the Cardinal line passes through the city and far exceeds the threshold of 40 riders per day necessary for a ticket agent within Amtrak's own guidelines. However, as I understand it, Amtrak calculated ridership totals based on weekly boardings, wholly ignoring the Cardinal line's restriction of service to three days a week. This policy penalizes the Charleston station for part-time service without allowing it to be a full-time station.

While I understand the need to improve efficiency and reduce overhead costs, I do not think this proposal achieves either objective. In fact, removing this well-respected ticket agent, our one and only ticket agent in the entire state, will make it harder for Amtrak to attract new customers and retain the ones you already have. I have heard from a number of constituents that they will no longer use Amtrak if they cannot buy their tickets from Matt Crouch. Furthermore, nearly 30% of West Virginia is without internet access, and mobile broadband access is also difficult in my state's rugged, mountainous terrain, making online ticket sales difficult. Our population includes many working class families and elderly residents who are less likely to have a credit card or another means to purchase tickets remotely, but rely heavily on the train as an alternative to driving or flying. They deserve at least one manned ticket counter in the state.

For much of my state's history, West Virginia has suffered the economic consequences of isolation caused by our mountainous terrain. A balanced, integrated, and efficient transportation system is critical to our continued economic viability. The state of West Virginia and the Charleston community have invested their own resources in this intermodal station to make bus transit available from other points in the state that would otherwise be unserved by Amtrak.

Instead of limiting opportunities for attracting new customers, we should be working together to strengthen the transportation options available to all West Virginians.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator