



Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund



July 21, 2025

Mr. Roger Harris
President
National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak)
1 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Disability Organizations Response to Office of Inspector General (OIG) Customer Service for Passengers with Disabilities Audit, Recommendations and Amtrak Action Plans

Dear President Harris,

The undersigned disability rights organizations are grateful for the July 11, 2025 OIG audit report *“Train Operations: The Company Can Improve the Quality of Customer Service to Passengers with Disabilities”* and corresponding action plans which shine a necessary light on ongoing issues with Amtrak passenger rail service.¹ As disability community representatives we appreciated the opportunity to be interviewed and inform the OIG’s investigation. While Amtrak staff have taken measures to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 35 years after its passing, customer service for disabled passengers can and must be improved. We know that Amtrak is the preferred mode of travel for many people with disabilities over airlines because wheelchair users can remain in their wheelchairs while traveling and not risk damage to their critical mobility devices. Amtrak is also the only mode available in some rural areas. It is essential. Amtrak leadership has stated that they are committed to increasing and maintaining ridership. These goals must include people with all types of disabilities.

We are pleased to see the recommendation and plan to collect, track and resolve all accessibility related complaints. This step is essential to ensuring repeat ridership from our community and maintaining Amtrak’s reputation. In addition, we strongly recommend Amtrak establish and make readily available an accessibility hotline and email address for customers who have questions or encounter problems before, during or after their travel. People with disabilities report difficulty identifying someone to speak to about their accessibility needs and complaints, and frequently encounter call center and other customer-facing staff with inconsistent knowledge of accessibility options and requirements. While the goal should be knowledge of accessibility processes and offerings amongst all customer facing staff and

supervisors, an accessibility hotline and email address would provide immediate relief to

We agree with the recommendation to track and use other sources of relevant data to improve customer service. The disabled customer experience should not be based only on complaints since that places the onus to identify service issues on those customers. Not all riders or potential riders lodge complaints nor should we have to in order to receive quality customer service. We hope that Amtrak will quickly develop, before the May 31, 2026 deadline, the Ask Now Survey for riders who have self-identified as needing assistance. We strongly encourage Amtrak go a step further by establishing an accessibility advisory council comprised of frequent disabled riders with all types of disabilities residing in urban and rural areas. The council could review the survey questions, results and Amtrak actions, and join meetings Amtrak currently convenes with disability organizations. We believe that insights provided from disabled users who value Amtrak are invaluable. We point to DREDF Board Member Aubrie Lee's blog post on Amtrak as proof.²

We also encourage Amtrak to continue to address issues that were identified within the report such as access to onboard amenities between cars, and those that were not, including availability of level boarding. The narrow aisle width that restricts many wheelchair users from travelling within or between cars is a continued barrier to amenities and safety. When a train entrance door is not level with the train platform, wheelchair users must rely on lifts that can be unstable, and require extra time for staff to deploy leading to frustration and stigma. Platforms that are level are always preferable for all riders and must continue to be the gold standard.

In addition, we urge Amtrak to prioritize continuing to improve communication access for Deaf and hard of hearing passengers. All critical auditory information—including announcements about delays, track changes, boarding, safety procedures, and emergencies—must be simultaneously conveyed in visual formats in a consistent manner. This includes the use of Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS) in stations and Onboard Information Systems (OBIS) on trains. These systems must be maintained, consistently used, and updated in real time. Ensuring that all passengers receive the same information, regardless of hearing status, is both an accessibility and safety imperative. This is a longstanding issue that continues to marginalize Deaf and hard of hearing passengers, and we urge Amtrak to address it as a priority in ongoing accessibility improvements.

The OIG report addresses barriers to booking for disabled riders through the website and mobile app. Many disabled riders will call, talk to ticket agents at stations or use a kiosk. Based on experiences shared, we believe booking options and information provided through these platforms is inconsistent at best. We encourage Amtrak to ensure training across *all* platforms and clear lines of communication to the accessibility office for all.

Finally, we hope that Amtrak will take additional steps to convey emergency plans for people with disabilities in the station and on board the trains, for example, ensuring there are

accessible modes of travel available to disabled passengers should a train be taken out of service mid route. People with disabilities will be able to travel with greater ease and peace of mind knowing they are not an afterthought.

We are grateful for the Office of the Inspector General, the Amtrak Accessibility Office and all departments and staff that have worked to improve accessibility for riders over the years. We look forward to supporting Amtrak's commitments made regarding the OIG recommendations and to additional efforts to ensure accessibility and a quality customer service experience. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions by contacting Carol Tyson, DREDF Government Affairs liaison, at ctyson@dredf.org.

Sincerely,

Access Living

American Council of the Blind

Deaf Equality

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

National Council on Independent Living

National Disability Rights Network

Paralyzed Veterans of America

cc:

Kevin H. Winters, Inspector General, Amtrak

David Handera, Vice President Accessibility, Stations and Facilities

Carol Lopez, Director Accessibility Office

Anthony Coscia, Chairman, Amtrak Board of Directors

¹ Amtrak Office of Inspector General. *Train Operations: The Company Can Improve the Quality of Customer Service to Passengers with Disabilities*, July 11, 2025 (OIG-A-2025-009).

<https://amtrakoig.gov/audit-documents/audit-reports/train-operations-company-can-improve-quality-customer-ser>

² Aubrie Lee and Peter Saathoff-Harshfield. *How Amtrak can Improve the Booking, Boarding, and Riding Experience for Disabled Travelers*. May 2025. <https://aubrieandpeter.com/how-amtrak-can-improve.html>