



September 11, 2019

Mr. Jim Mathews
Rail Passenger Association
1200 G St. NW, Suite 240
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Mathews,

Thank you for your letter. Amtrak appreciates and values feedback from the Rail Passengers Association, especially your personal interest in our success. I wanted to take the opportunity to address each one of your questions and concerns to show we are listening and are responsive.

It's an exciting and demanding time at Amtrak. Customer expectations are changing. Costs continue their upward trend. New customers are finding and trying us for the first time. And trip durations on our legacy overnight trains are shortening. Given these trends and to ensure our success, we are committed to evolving our onboard dining services with the one-night trains in our long-distance network.

When we started the Contemporary Food Program in June 2018, we initiated it as an ever-evolving process. We're continuously refining and improving its product offerings and delivery methods. We have and continue to listen, understand, and adapt the program. We are hopeful the changes address many of the concerns laid out.

October 1st, we will introduce new menu choices with an entirely new delivery method, eliminating the box. The new model introduces an elegant reusable tray as shown here.



As part of our launch, we will be hosting a tasting event this month here in Washington and we are hopeful that representatives from your association can attend.



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We are excited to debut this new service for our customers. We have incorporated feedback from customers who experienced our original contemporary model aboard the Capitol and Lake Shore Limited.

1) No purchase option for coach passengers (combined with limited Café Car alternatives).

Product Development and Customer Experience has teamed with Amtrak's Information Technology (IT) department to bring new technology in 2020 that will help solve this issue. We will offer a new solution: Pre-Order, which will allow Coach customers to order food during the booking process, then retrieve their meal onboard. This alleviates multiple issues that Amtrak faces by doing the following:

- Offer contemporary food to Coach passengers
- Customers get their first choice increasing customer satisfaction and the customer experience
- Reduces spoilage

2) Insufficient quantities and choices loaded aboard the train, with many items unavailable.

The original contemporary model was rigid and did not allow for customer modification, and thus was perceived as a low-quality alternative. At this point we realized words and perception were vastly different than reality. Learning from this, we now have four hot meal options, dessert and breakfast options.

Insufficient quantities are an issue we are attempting to improve through the implementation of Point-of-Sale and the aforementioned Pre-Order. In addition, we are launching Pre-Select in the 1st half of FY20, which will allow Sleeper Customers to select their meal option before departure. Customers will get their first choice increasing customer satisfaction and the customer experience.

3) Insufficient hot-food options

As noted above, we have already expanded our options to four offerings. As our technology improvements advance with Pre-Select and Pre-Order, we will explore adding more options. Additionally, we will be able to rotate our menu more frequently.

4) Insufficient kosher choices

Currently there are four and we are looking at revamping the offerings. Currently Kosher represents only 1% of our total usage across the entire Amtrak network. This percentage is about half Acela and the other half Long-Distance. As our technology improvements advance with Pre-



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Select and Pre-Order, we will explore adding more options. Special meals due to low volumes create problems and if RPA has any recommendations, please share. We are willing to work together.

5) Perfunctory breakfast choices

I am not sure what is meant by “perfunctory.” The traditional service did not have unique offerings.

That said, our goal is to provide meal periods defined in our policies and provide them consistently. Menu offerings are developed based on a few factors. First, we see what our suppliers have available. Then we use Market Research in two ways. We look at data, outside Amtrak, that shows top selling items by category. We also monitor customer satisfaction of items through our surveys.

6) Indifferent on-board service and presentation

These inconsistencies are not unique to contemporary service but are present across the entire network. We recognize our OBS staff work extremely hard in delivering services to our customers. We also acknowledge we need to perform better change management to deliver consistency in training and oversight. In FY20, we plan develop a strategy along with Operations and the OBS staff to improve services across the network.

7) Large quantities of trash waste (the box, the bag, the plasticware, etc.)

We are very mindful of this issue and are hopeful the introduction of the reusable tray will reduce onboard waste. The complimentary fabric bag will be removed from the service starting 1 OCT. We continue to explore new dishware whether it is compostable or biodegradable e.g. sugarcane. However, these introduce new logistical issues that would need to be addressed.

8) Presentation and plating

We hope the new tray presentation as shown above offers a nicer presentation and plating than the current box. We will continue to refine our design based on form and function.



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Questions

- 1) Are any elements of the Eastern trains dining plans open to refinement before launch in October?*

We are open to any suggestive refinements that don't compromise the project launch on 1 OCT. Certainly, we will look forward to your members' feedback as well as our customers and others as we move forward with this program. As with any launch of this nature, we anticipate there will be aspects that need to be adjusted. That has been the way we approached the past launch and will continue to do so as we expand, we look forward to the active participation of your Advisory Group.

- 2) How will the new dining cars – purchased and approved with taxpayer dollars to serve as dining cars – be utilized in this new service model?*

As you are aware, our long-term objective is to move to a one car model that can service both Coach and Sleeper customers. We have hired a design firm to develop conceptual designs that will embrace this vision and bring a contemporary feel to the car. In FY20, we will begin to progress these designs into integration, then operation.

In the meantime, the Viewliner II cars will be utilized in the same manner they are used on the Lake Shore Limited today with the current model. The car will offer Sleeping class customers an exclusive car for customers to lounge, eat or socialize.

- 3) What plans exist to address shortfalls in items aboard the trains and options for those with special needs (kosher, vegetarian, allergies, etc.)?*

We continue to refine our menu options with healthier, more nutritious options that align with prescribed dietary daily values e.g. low sodium. This is more difficult than most realize. There are dozens and dozens of different diets and over 170 food allergens (eight severe), and this doesn't even include people's tastes and opinions. These present major hurdles in trying to determine menu selection. Through technological advances, culinary innovation, and our customer surveys we will be able to expand our offerings and offer more items that address these special needs.

- 4) What is the status of food-service equipment upgrades that were contemplated to improve the taste and appearance of dining-car food?*



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In the coming months, an RFP will be released to source new tableware products that are sustainable without neglecting contemporary style. We are looking to develop modern tableware for our Premium Acela service and our Traditional Dining service. Our goal is to create a tableware that has a high performance and is multifunctional to help save time and space. We are looking to move toward a more modern style to let the presentation and the quality of the food speak for itself.

5) *What are Amtrak's plans for dining changes on the Western trains, i.e., National Network trains such as the Empire Builder, California Zephyr, Southwest Chief, Coast Starlight and Sunset Limited?*

We are planning to perform a menu refresh sometime in the first half of FY20. Currently there are no plans to change the service model for our two-night trains. We will launch new soft goods, e.g. new mattresses, new towels, new bedding this coming year.

I hope we have addressed your questions and concerns. I think it is important to note that we are moving away from the exclusively communal dining model on our one-night trains. I believe that change management of our initiatives is greater than the actual food design. We have not cut food costs nor is that our intent. Our intent is to create a model that attracts multiple demographics. This accounts for the trend of customers travelling shorter intervals and frequencies on overnight (one-night trains) which is consistent with our overall long-term network strategy.

We appreciate your organization's passion and advocacy—and recognize our shared goal of delivering exemplary rail travel. We remain available and encourage more dialogue regarding these matters.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P. Wilander", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Wilander
Vice President
Product Development & Customer Experience
AMTRAK