

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Andre Carson testified today before the U.S. House of Representatives Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee on the importance of keeping Amtrak's maintenance facility in Beech Grove, Indiana, open and fully operational. Below is Congressman Carson's prepared testimony.

"I want to first thank Chairwoman Brown and Ranking Member Shuster for holding this timely hearing on Amtrak Reauthorization. As you know, my grandmother was a member this distinguished subcommittee and, like her, I hold it and its members in the highest regard. I truly thank you for giving me the opportunity to briefly testify today. I also want to inform the Committee that I will have to leave after my testimony to attend another hearing.

"Madam Chairwoman, as this country's sole provider of regularly scheduled intercity passenger rail service, Amtrak's importance and necessity to all Americans is clear. In the face of continually rising gas prices, overloaded highways and congested airports; many Americans are being forced to make difficult financial decisions regarding their modes of travel. Amtrak has become an ever more viable transportation option at such a time, and continues to be a practical option for many of those people searching for an efficient and economic travel alternative.

"Madam Chairwoman, as you know, Amtrak carried almost 25.8 million passengers and posted approximately \$1.5 Billion in ticket revenue in 2007. This is a gain of 10 percent over FY06 ticket revenues, and is the third consecutive year, that ticket revenues have increased. It is through a combination of increased profits and a reauthorization bill that proposes \$14.4 Billion dollars over the next five years that Amtrak will have an incredible opportunity to thrive and flourish.

"However, Amtrak has many hurdles to overcome as well. The biggest of which is its \$3.17 billion dollars worth of debt. Although Amtrak has taken great steps in reducing its debt by almost \$600 million since 2002, it still has a long way to go. As a result, it is extremely important that Amtrak makes business decisions that maximize their current resources while maintaining the highest quality of service and facilities.

"Madam Chairwoman, the maximization of Amtrak's facilities is an issue that particularly hits home with constituents from the 7th District of Indiana. As you know, I have the Beech Grove Amtrak maintenance facility located within my district, which is the largest Amtrak maintenance facility in the country. And I'm proud to say, that the Chairwoman came to the facility personally- and I thank her for that.

"Approximately 550 experienced employees at this facility perform a myriad of train maintenance from wheel work to painting. A lot of these people have 10 years or more experience on the job and really take pride in what they do. But recently, many of the employees at this facility have been notified that a lot of the work they do will be transferred to other facilities and that they will have to either move with their jobs or lose them.

“In speaking with many of these employees, I was told that in the past there have been repeated attempts to close and move this facility. They also mentioned Amtrak has continually increased the amount of work being outsourced and that this facility has been forced to downsize its entire workforce.

“Madam Chairwoman, I would be the first to understand if Amtrak simply did not have enough work to keep this facility open. Everyone understands that industries change, and therefore a company’s labor needs must be realized. However, that is not the case for this facility; Amtrak has a backlog of cars waiting to be fixed. As you know, many freight companies have locomotives that need maintenance as well and in-sourcing this work would give Amtrak an amazing opportunity to grow its profits.

“If Amtrak could be incentivised to lessen its practice of outsourcing and began to in-source more work and find viable ways to do maintenance work for freight companies, Amtrak would raise its revenue and the facility in Beech Grove would thrive. The Beech Grove facility needs more work and it already has all the equipment necessary to fix Amtrak cars. And finally, the Beech Grove facility is already up and running with a highly experienced and knowledgeable labor force.

“For example, last year the California Department of Labor asked the Beech Grove maintenance facility to rebuild two of its damaged Superliner Cars. After receiving the completed work, the California DOT then wrote a letter to Mr. Kummant, praising the professionalism and quality of the final product.

“Madam Chairwoman, we all want Amtrak to do well, and be profitable. And I believe the need to incentivise the in-sourcing of their own maintenance work, and having the opportunity to do maintenance work from rail companies, can greatly impact Amtrak’s profits, and aid to ensure its financial solvency and give hard working Americans like those at the Beech Grove facility, a fair chance to aid in the reinvestment of our nation’s infrastructure.

“Madam Chairwoman I ask unanimous consent that a letter from the California Dept. of Transportation be inserted with my testimony for the record.

“Thank you for your time.”