

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 1, 2019

Richard Anderson  
President and CEO, Amtrak  
60 Massachusetts Avenue NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Anderson:

We write to voice our concerns about yesterday's Amtrak signaling equipment failure at Chicago Union Station. The failure significantly impacted over 100,000 Metra and Amtrak passengers who depend on reliable passenger rail service through Union Station every day to get to and from their jobs, their schools, and their families. Commuters throughout the Chicago region deserve answers. We urge Amtrak to provide a thorough explanation to the public of the root causes of the system failure and to work with Metra and your freight rail partners to develop and implement both short- and long-term changes to its protocols to ensure this type of breakdown in operations never happens again.

At approximately 8:30 a.m. yesterday morning, Amtrak's computer system at Chicago Union Station experienced a hardware failure that prevented it from communicating with signal switches at the station, initially halting all train movement in and out of the station and then only allowing Amtrak to move trains in and out of the station one at a time by manually operating signal switches. The failure was reportedly caused by Amtrak's violation of its own information technology protocols. Amtrak technicians made updates to its system during morning rush hour in Chicago, instead of overnight as required, which would have protected against the significant impacts the failure had on commuters. The system failure lasted over 12 hours, impacting both the morning and evening commutes and resulting in overcrowding and hours-long delays for passengers.

Chicago Union Station is a vital hub not only for our region's transportation system, but for the entire national passenger rail network. It's used by 31 million commuter and intercity passengers every year. As the owner and operator of Chicago Union Station, Amtrak is responsible for the movement of all trains in and out of the station. Any delay caused by Amtrak's equipment at Union Station not only impacts the nearly 10,000 Amtrak passengers who travel on 58 Amtrak trains through the Union Station every day, but also the more than 110,000 commuters who move through the station aboard 240 daily Metra trains. For many of these commuters, Metra is the only affordable and accessible transportation option they have to get to and from Chicago, and yesterday's equipment failure forced these commuters to wait for hours at stations or on overcrowded trains just to get home.

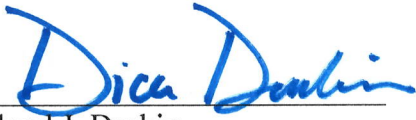
The significant impact of yesterday's signaling failure raises questions about the reliability of Union Station's computer and signaling system and the policies and procedures in place to prevent and respond to these types of emergencies. It also underlines the need for increased investment in Chicago Union Station and the region's passenger rail system especially

as Positive Train Control safety technology comes online across the region over the next several months.

As strong supporters of passenger rail service, we are proud that we were able to secure more than \$1.2 billion in federal funding for Amtrak's national network, which includes Chicago Union Station, in the recently passed Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations bill (Pub.L.116-6). And we stand ready to advocate for whatever additional federal resources are needed to ensure safe and efficient operations at Chicago Union Station.

We urge Amtrak to immediately address the causes of yesterday's system failure and to implement policies and operational changes necessary to prevent this from happening again. We ask that the full results of Amtrak's investigation into the issue be made public to ensure Amtrak remains accountable to the region's commuters.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator