

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 18, 2023

Mr. Anthony Coscia
Chair, Amtrak Board of Directors
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Chair Coscia:

We write to request information on the progress Amtrak is making to connect the *Vermont* line to Canada by rail, including:

- The steps Amtrak is taking to set up an interim preclearance program pending completion of the preclearance facility at Montreal Central Station, Quebec;
- Identifying additional federal actions needed to facilitate the full implementation of the preclearance program; and
- The expected timeline for completion of a preclearance facility at Montreal Station.

Expanding Amtrak's existing service to connect Vermont and Quebec—already Vermont's largest international trading partner—would improve economic opportunity in our state. For many Vermont businesses and residents, Montreal is the closest out-of-state metropolitan area—closer even than Boston or New York City. However, despite this centuries-long relationship encompassing cross-border communities, friends, families, and businesses, Amtrak's *Vermont* line has not traveled to Montreal since 1995.

As you know, a key challenge to expanding rail service to Quebec is the lack of preclearance operations in Canada that would allow passengers to undergo customs checks prior to boarding their train. Preclearance would reduce delays associated with international rail travel, improve safety and security along our northern border, and strengthen the cultural and commercial ties between the United States and Canada.

Congress authorized Amtrak to expand preclearance operations to allow rail activities in Canada in 2016.¹ More than seven years later, logistical and operational obstacles remain to the full implementation of preclearance activities between the regions and a preclearance facility in Montreal Central Station has yet to be completed.²

¹ *Promoting Travel, Commerce, and National Security Act* (P.L. 114-316).

² Since 2016, Congress, Amtrak, and several Executive Agencies have further laid the groundwork for preclearance operations, most recently completing a report commissioned in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (P.L. 117-58) to study methods to improve passenger rail connections between the U.S. and Canada. This report emphasizes the importance of preclearance to guarantee efficient and expeditious travel, as existing cross-border

Last summer, Amtrak resumed service for the first time in nearly 50 years on the *Ethan Allen Express* line, transporting travelers between New York and Vermont with newly reopened stations in Burlington, Middlebury, and Vergennes. This route has already proven incredibly popular, with Vermont state rail officials estimating ridership will exceed 33,000 in its first year of operation.³ The *Ethan Allen* line has made an immediate economic impact in Vermont, bringing visitors from out of state to support our vibrant small businesses. Further expanding rail service between Vermont and Quebec would build on this progress and deliver more economic benefits to the people of Vermont.

We appreciate your partnership in expanding rail service in Vermont and look forward to working with you to fully implement preclearance operations. We ask that you provide responses to the following inquiries no later than October 18, 2023:

1. What interim steps is Amtrak taking to establish a preclearance program at Montreal Central Station before a permanent facility can be constructed? How is Amtrak working with U.S. Customs and Border Protection on these steps?
2. From its consultation with other executive agencies, how soon does Amtrak anticipate a preclearance program may begin between Montreal and Vermont?
3. What additional federal actions—including those taken by Amtrak or in coordination with U.S. Customs and Border Protection—are needed to expedite the completion of this process and to specifically address:
 - a. Expanding the number of qualified personnel;
 - b. Reducing equipment shortages;
 - c. Negotiating right to access agreements between Amtrak and Canadian host railroads;
 - d. Establishing a sterile corridor border crossing; and
 - e. Funding and financing the construction of a preclearance facility?
4. What is the expected timeline for the construction of the preclearance facility at Montreal Central Station?

We look forward to hearing from you and continuing our collaboration to improve both domestic and international rail service to support rural communities in Vermont and across the country.

Sincerely,



PETER WELCH
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT
Member of Congress

routes experience far too many delays due to customs inspections. (Amtrak, *Report on Amtrak Cross Border Operations* (November 15, 2022) (online at <https://columbiacollege-ca.libguides.com/chicago/govdocs>).

³ Melissa Cooney, "Vt. Amtrak ridership exceeds expectations; Montreal planning continues," *WCAX* (May 16, 2023) (online at www.wcax.com/2023/05/16/amtrak-recap-summer-ridership-outlook-potential-expansion/).

cc: Troy A. Miller, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection