



January 19, 2022

Stephen Gardner, President  
National Passenger Railroad Corporation/Amtrak  
1 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington DC 20001

Dear Mr. Gardner:

We are writing to you on behalf of a coalition of disability rights organizations brought together following the issuance of the National Disability Rights Network's (NDRN) 2013 report, "All Aboard Except for People with Disabilities" to express our strong concerns with Amtrak's current narrow aisle design of the Intercity Train (ICT) sets that you are planning to purchase.

The current design (as documented below) fails to address the accessibility needs of people with disabilities, and in fact continues Amtrak's history of segregation and inaccessibility. We ask that you address the issues discussed below before purchasing these new trains.

As you may know, NDRN's report initiated a Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation, a 2015 Letter of Findings, and ultimately a settlement agreement and claimant compensation fund in 2020 for Amtrak's failures to make its stations accessible. After years of struggling to make stations accessible, and recently receiving billions of dollars in new funds through the recently enacted infrastructure bill, are you truly planning to take a step back by not purchasing fully accessible trains?

For many years, NDRN and members of the disability community have met regularly with Amtrak regarding its slow progress in making its stations accessible especially for people with mobility disabilities as well as deaf and hard of hearing passengers. Over the years, we have also brought to Amtrak's attention weaknesses with its training of staff and inaccessibility issues with its website and mobile app.

Also during this time, Amtrak has sought input from the disability community on Amtrak's efforts to make its existing rolling stock more accessible. The disability community was also able to provide substantial input on the design of the carbon fiber bridgeplates and limited input into the design of the restrooms and wheelchair space and tables in Amtrak's new Acela trains. Amtrak has also made some improvements in your existing fleet without seeking specific input from the disability community such as providing new accessible tables in the wheelchair spaces in both the single level and bi-level cars and new ADA compliant grab bars in the bi-level cars.

When Brightline/Virgin Trains, began service in 2018, it marketed itself as "the first fully Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible train in the country." Brightline and the car manufacturer Siemens highlighted the ability to roll on and through the train without assistance, aisles that are 32 inches wide, automatically opening interior doors, larger bathrooms with accessible features and automated "gap fillers" which automatically extend to fill the space between the car floors and station platforms. Unfortunately, when NDRN staff and a public member of the U.S. Access Board who himself is a wheelchair user and transportation accessibility expert rode the Brightline trains in 2019 they discovered that the restroom was not fully accessible as it lacked a large enough turning radius to be truly accessible.

When California and a consortium of Midwest states contracted with Siemens for single level cars very similar to the Brightline cars for use by Amtrak, NDRN led an effort by our members Disability Rights California and Equip for Equality, Access Living and other disability advocates to meet with the states to improve on the accessibility deficiencies we found in the Brightline cars. These organizations advocated for a lift in every car, two wheelchair seats together, some number of easily removable seats so that a group of wheelchair users can sit together, a restroom in every car, and more space in each restroom.

While the disability advocacy groups were unsuccessful in their advocacy for larger restrooms and a lift on every car, it is our understanding Siemens is working on an additional door opening control for the restroom to improve access.

When we heard Siemens had been selected to manufacture Amtrak's own

ICTs, we felt there was an opportunity to build on the improvements made to the original Brightline train design and the trains to be used in California and the Midwest by now including larger restrooms and removeable seats to allow a group of wheelchair users to ride in the same car together. These two improvements would ensure the full accessibility of restrooms for people with disabilities and allow for groups of people with disabilities (going to a celebration or making their voices heard in state capitals or Washington DC) to travel together like groups of individuals without disabilities can currently do on an Amtrak train.

When Amtrak initially disclosed some of the features of the ICTs to NDRN and other disability advocates, we were told that the restrooms were large enough to provide a 60-inch turning circle and that some cars would have two wheelchair spaces together, features we had been seeking for many years. We also believed as Siemens has shown in its literature<sup>1</sup> that the cars would have 32-inch-wide aisles.

However, when more details about the cars were revealed, we were dismayed to learn that Amtrak's design was a huge step backward by narrowing the aisles to confine almost all wheelchair users to the wheelchair spaces next to the accessible restroom-

In choosing to provide aisles that are only 24 inches wide instead of 32 inches wide which is the ADA standard for accessibility in buildings, other public facilities, and transportation vehicles, many if not most wheelchair users would be unable to access a restroom in an adjacent car, have access to the food service car or be able to move to or from a quiet car.

If Amtrak goes forward with this design with narrow 24 inch aisles, in the event the carborne lift on a car malfunctioned, a wheelchair user would be unable to go to an adjoining car to have access to the car-borne lift in the adjacent car. Additionally, if during the trip the ability to use the accessible restroom were to stop (the door or some part of the restroom were to break or become overloaded) a person with a disability would have no access to a restroom because they could not move from one car to another car with a

---

<sup>1</sup> Siemens Rail Systems Intercity Passenger Coach one page - Specifications provide for 32 inch wide aisle (see highlight); Siemens Venture Passenger Cars - Setting the new standard for intercity passenger cars showing Illinois DOT & CalDOT cars - Specifications include 32 inch wide aisles (highlight) Copies attached

working restroom. This design is clearly on its face segregation of people with disabilities in certain sections of the train as opposed to what is offered to people without disabilities, that is full access to the train.

The benefits of wider aisles extend beyond just making the train accessible to people with disabilities. Much like we have seen with other accessibility improvements, i.e. curb cuts, wider aisles provide better access to all passengers. People using walkers or canes and other passengers with luggage will have sufficient space to traverse the car and emergency personnel would have more critical space to evacuate ill or injured passengers.

Finally, this narrow aisle design also goes against the integration mandate of the ADA. The intent of the ADA is to fully integrate people with disabilities into society. If passengers with disabilities are relegated to a certain part of a specific space on a specific train car with no flexibility, their full right to integration is denied.

Calling this design final is unacceptable. The construction of the ICT cars will likely not even begin for several more years and not enter service for several years after that. To comply with the integration mandate of the ADA and Amtrak's stated goals of exceeding the requirements of the ADA, Amtrak's ICT cars need to be designed to accommodate all passengers with disabilities for now and the future and provide the most accessible railcars possible.

We urge you to reconsider the current aisle width design choice for ICTs and provide the same consistent aisle width as in the Brightline and the Siemens Venture cars to be used by Amtrak in California and the Midwest. We also want Amtrak's firm commitment to provide easily removable seats and to continue dialogue with the disability community to provide future input to make these cars truly the most accessible railcars in the country and possibly the world.

Again, in the name of full integration, we oppose Amtrak's current aisle width design for the ICTs and request a meeting to discuss this inappropriate design. Please reach out with any questions, and to set up this meeting, to Claire Stanley, public policy analyst, with the National Disability Rights Network at [Claire.stanley@ndrn.org](mailto:Claire.stanley@ndrn.org).

Sincerely:

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
Delaware Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.  
Disability Law Center of Massachusetts  
disAbility Law Center of Virginia  
Disability Rights Connecticut  
Disability Rights Maine  
Disability Rights New Jersey  
Disability Rights New York  
Disability Rights Oregon  
Disability Rights North Carolina  
Disability Rights Pennsylvania  
Disability Rights Rhode Island  
Disability Rights South Carolina  
Disability Rights Vermont  
Disability Rights Washington

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Cure SMA  
Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council  
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Council on Independent Living  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Spina Bifida Association  
United Cerebral Palsy  
United Spinal

Access Living  
Disability Rights Advocates