

October 31, 2007

# Senate Votes for Increase in Subsidy for Amtrak

The New York Times

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 30 — The Senate on Tuesday authorized a sharp increase in federal money for Amtrak for six years. The vote signaled a desire for a major investment in the money-losing railroad service when the Bush administration and other critics say it should be privatized.

The Senate voted, 70 to 22, for \$11.4 billion, or \$1.9 billion a year, up from \$1.2 billion that corporation has received in recent years.

The authorization does not guarantee that Amtrak will receive all the money, which would have to be included in annual budget bills. But it makes it less likely that Amtrak will face cuts in its subsidy and that passengers will face cuts in service.

The bill would also remove a provision from existing law that requires Amtrak to work toward fiscal self-sufficiency.

Senator [Frank R. Lautenberg](#), Democrat of New Jersey, who sponsored the reauthorization with Senator [Trent Lott](#), Republican of Mississippi, praised the Senate as making “travel easier and more reliable for the American people.”

“We’re giving them relief,” Mr. Lautenberg said after the vote. “Relief from traffic congestion, relief from lines at the airport, relief from planes lined up on the tarmac. Today, the Senate has said to American travelers, ‘You will have another choice.’”

The House, historically less generous toward Amtrak than the Senate, has yet to act on the bill. Over nearly four days of debate on the Senate floor, critics of the subsidies used the opportunity to lay out a long list of complaints about Amtrak management and performance, including financial failures.

Senator [Christopher S. Bond](#), Republican of Missouri, said the bill needed a clarification of corporation’s mission.

“Is it supposed to provide only those services where it can make a profit?” Mr. Bond asked. “Is it supposed to supplement air service in specific markets regardless of cost? Is it supposed to serve rural markets regardless of cost? Is it supposed to provide tourist travel regardless of cost?”

“All of these have been held out from time to time as reasons to subsidize Amtrak and as reasons why it should not be held accountable for the effective use of the taxpayers’ money. However, those are empty excuses.”

Mr. Bond and other critics pointed to money-losing food and beverage services on the railroad and first-class service on long-distance routes as examples of costs that they said taxpayers should not have to subsidize.

Senator [Tom Coburn](#), Republican of Oklahoma, tried to amend the bill to require Amtrak to provide quarterly reports on the finances of its food and beverage services and to limit those services on money-losing routes.

The bill’s supporters argued that national rail service was vital and that the government had never provided enough money for the kind of high-quality, high-speed service in countries like France and Japan.

High gasoline prices and congestion on highways and at airports have helped increase demand for rail services. Last week, Amtrak reported an 11 percent increase in ticket revenue for the recent fiscal year, to \$1.5 billion, from \$1.37 billion.