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Testimony of The Honorable Kirk Watson
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Getting on the Right Track: Navigating the Future of Passenger Rail in America

Subcommittee
On
Railroads, Pipelines & Hazardous Materials

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Introduction

Chair Nehls, Ranking Member Payne, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am pleased that the Subcommittee is holding this hearing. It is certainly timely. We are now just over two years into the five years of surface transportation investments authorized and appropriated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), including record levels of federal investment in intercity passenger rail.

At the broadest level, I am eager to do anything I can to support improved intercity passenger rail in Texas. Texas and its cities are leading the nation in growth, and we desperately need to improve multimodal mobility between the cities and metropolitan areas that are the bedrock of our state's thriving economy.

When Austin's tiny Amtrak station was built in 1947, Austin's population was just over 100,000. Today, our population is nearly a million, making Austin the tenth largest city in the United States. Austin has been the fastest growing metropolitan area since 2010; its metropolitan area population now exceeds 2.4 million. Other Texas cities and metropolitan areas are experiencing similarly robust growth.

Austin is carrying out a multibillion-dollar investment in transportation infrastructure, including in our rapidly growing airport and, working with TXDOT and Texas local governments, we are investing tens of billions of dollars more in highways, local roads, and transit such as a voter approved rail system. However, at the end of the day, the laws of physics make it a simple fact that the highways and airports connecting Texas cities cannot keep up with the demands of our state's economy and the mobility needs of its people.

That is why I am glad federal agencies, Amtrak, TXDOT, and Texas cities and counties are looking to improve intercity passenger rail service in Texas, and more specifically on the Texas Triangle. These potential investments will provide an attractive and convenient option for travel between Texas cities. Just as or even more importantly, I firmly believe they will lay the foundation for future service expansion and improvements.

My testimony focuses on six primary topics:

- IIJA's intercity passenger rail investments;
- National and state plans for improving intercity passenger rail;
- The need to invest in a multimodal transportation system connecting the cities of the Texas Triangle;
- TXDOT and local government efforts to leverage items 2 and 3 above;
- The importance of intercity passenger rail on-time performance; and
- The impact of the pandemic on transportation, how we can adapt, and the lessons it provides.

IIJA Intercity Passenger Rail Investments

As this Subcommittee knows, the IIJA authorizes and appropriates record levels of federal investment in intercity passenger rail. IIJA authorizes $137 billion for intercity passenger rail programs and provides advance fiscal years 2022-2026 appropriations of $66 billion for those programs, a 140% increase over funding provided under the FAST Act. In addition, Congress has provided regular, annual appropriations for many of those programs, which I hope you will continue to do in the coming years. Investments in intercity passenger rail are also eligible under several of IIJA's other surface transportation grant programs. Altogether, these investments provide a window of opportunity for Amtrak, other intercity passenger rail

providers, and state and local governments to improve intercity passenger rail in the coming years.

The $66 billion that IIJA appropriates for rail is more than the total federal funding provided for Amtrak over the past 52 years. (For those people who are quick to point out Amtrak's faults but shy to offer solutions: at the end of the day, you get the transportation system you pay for, in terms of both mode share and quality.)

Of that $66 billion, $22 billion is for Amtrak to focus on improving and upgrading Amtrak's assets and $44 billion will flow through Federal Railroad Administration discretionary grant programs.

The $22 billion for Amtrak to modernize their assets (fleet, accessibility, infrastructure state of good repair, major stations) will:

- Modernize stations, enhancing the customer experience with improved design, technology, and connections to other transportation services,
- Replace and repair infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels, and facilities, many that are over a century old to better support Amtrak, commuter, and freight service,
- Buy new rolling stock to replace all of Amtrak's 20th Century equipment and accommodate improved and expanded service, including locomotives and passenger cars (which are also an investment in American-made equipment, and helping the country grow more well-paying jobs).

The $66 billion will allow Amtrak, states, and local governments to make investments that will improve both intercity passenger rail and freight rail.

In short, Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration will be spending a lot of money on infrastructure improvements, facility improvements, and new rolling stock in the coming years. As the Mayor of Austin and a resident of the Texas Triangle, I want some of that money to be spent on Texas tracks and Texas stations, and I want some of those shiny new trains running in Texas and providing Texans with a much-needed and long-overdue mobility option.

National & State Plans for Intercity Passenger Rail Improvements

So I am pleased that in the wake of the enactment of IIJA, there are exciting plans at the federal and state level to improve intercity passenger rail. As I look at these plans, I am not only convinced that our nation and Texas should make these investments, but that we cannot afford to miss this opportunity.

I am especially interested in the successful model implemented by states such as California, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia to leverage federal, state, and local funds to improve intercity passenger rail service on corridors that are in the "sweet spot" for intercity passenger rail service. In general, those corridors serve densely populated areas and connect cities less than 500 miles apart.

Investments in corridors like these in the nation's most densely populated areas have the potential to:

- Create redundancy in regional transportation systems, relieving stress on overburdened airports and highways, and providing the traveling public with an alternative to flying or driving, especially for those people who are unable or simply prefer not to drive
- Meet latent and growing demand for intercity passenger rail travel, especially among the young adults and seniors who often prefer rail travel,
- Improve mobility,

- Reduce car crashes and the accompanying injuries and fatalities, and
- Increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

Experience shows that investment in regional intercity passenger rail corridors pays dividends because they address the basic math and physics problem facing regional mobility in the nation's megaregions, where airports and highways are struggling to meet current demand, much less future growth.

Compiling and combining quotes from several recent studies:

> *"While our infrastructure may be standing still, traffic has continued to grow. Travel on the nation's Interstate highways is increasing at a rate nearly triple the rate that new lane capacity is being added. Between the turn of the century and 2016, total highway vehicle miles traveled (VMT) have increased more than 15%. That means the frustrating congestion drivers experience on urban interstates today, where 47% of highway miles are congested during peak periods, will become the norm between major cities as well. The increases are heavily concentrated in urban areas, where VMTs grew more than 33% between 2000 and 2016, further straining the transportation infrastructure at the point where capacity increases were most limited.*[1] *The Federal Highway Administration projects that vehicle miles traveled on U.S. highways will increase 22% above 2019 levels by 2037 an increase that will translate into greater emissions and higher costs to consumers—who will derive no corresponding benefit from sitting in traffic. While autonomous vehicles are on the horizon, they're unlikely to have a material impact on highway congestion in a world*

[1] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/travel_monitoring/22septvt/22septvt.pdf

where travel demand continues to grow, and additional road capacity is limited. Amtrak will continue to study and review this topic.

In the aviation sector, the picture of projected growth combined with static or falling capacity is very similar. The Federal Aviation Administration projects that the number of domestic airline passengers will grow 56% above 2019 levels by 2048.[2] However, although domestic air travel has been growing overall, the number of short-distance flights has fallen. There are fewer passengers and fewer flights in most short distance city pairs due to the unfavorable economics of short distance flights and the disproportionate impact of enhanced security screening and other delays on shorter trips.

A study by aircraft manufacturer Bombardier found that air passenger trips in city pairs separated by fewer than 500 miles fell 30% from 2000 to 2016. By contrast, when offered frequent, efficient rail service, travelers have shown they prefer it. During the 2000-2015 period, ridership on Amtrak's state-supported short distance trains increased 70%. During 2019, Amtrak carried more than three times as many riders between Washington, DC, and New York City than all of the airlines combined, and Amtrak carried more riders between New York City and Boston than all of the airlines combined. Continued capacity constraints and delays are likely to accelerate this trend, resulting in less air service and higher airfares in short-distance markets."[3]

[2] https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/FY%202023-2043%20Full%20Forecast%20Document%20and%20Tables_0.pdf
[3] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/reports/Amtrak-2021-Corridor-Vision-060121.pdf

I am especially impressed with the investments that Virginia, North Carolina, and the states of the upper Midwest have made over the past 15 years to improve intercity passenger rail service along heavily traveled corridors that, like the Texas Triangle, have rapidly growing populations and congested interstate highways with no room to accommodate projected future growth.

Looking to Virginia, the investments started under a Republican Governor and continued by his Democratic and Republican successors to improve intercity passenger rail travel have paid big dividends. These investments extended the reach of the Northeast Corridor to additional cities, increased frequencies, and reduced travel times. As a result, ridership on state-supported corridors in Virginia has more than tripled over the past decade.[4] The same thing has happened in North Carolina: ridership on its Charlotte-to-Raleigh Piedmont route has increased nearly 350% in the past 15 years due to investments made during the administrations of both Republican and Democratic governors, and has broken ridership records in the past year.[5] Just as importantly, these state investments made with bipartisan support have attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in federal grants and laid the groundwork for additional investments that will further increase service and reliability and drive additional ridership and economic growth.

My hope is that Texas can use these models to leverage IIJA to improve intercity passenger rail service between communities along the Texas Triangle.

[4] https://vapassengerrailauthority.org/transformingrail/
[5] https://www.ncdot.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/2023/2023-01-18-ncdot-ncbytrain-ridership.aspx

Beyond domestic comparisons, looking to intercity passenger rail service between the major Texas cities and those of Germany or another Western European country further bolster the case for investment in the Texas Triangle and other similar corridors.

Across Europe, nearly $1 trillion has been invested in rail since 2000 and Germany spends about 4 times as much as the US annually on intercity passenger rail. Again, at the end of the day, you get the transportation system you pay for, in terms of both mode share and quality.[6]

Germany is Europe's largest rail system in terms of annual passengers. While the nation is roughly half the size of Texas, and its population of 83 million is barely a quarter of the U.S. population, its total network size is equal to Amtrak's but with 5 times as many trips, 151 million in 2019.

- Germany has strategically developed high-speed segments to speed up certain city pair and international routes, while investing in what are called "conventional" routes – or trains that are typically moving at around 80 -100 mph – to bring them up to 100 to 150 mph standards, achieving overall trip times competitive with driving and flying.
    - Only 6% of Deutsche Bahn's network operates at speeds above 155 mph, yet the network serves as the primary mode of intercity travel for many because it is a comprehensive, integrated, and convenient travel network.

[6] *2000-2019 data from "Data Analysis: Trains remain underfunded in Europe," Investigate Europe, 19 Nov 2021, https://www.investigate-europe.eu/en/2021/despite-public-support-for-rail-trains-remain-underfunded-in-europe/*

The example of Germany also easily counters perhaps the laziest and most poorly thought-out argument against improving intercity passenger rail in our nation: that we are too large and spread out for intercity passenger rail to be successful. As outlined in the comparison of Germany to Texas, that argument misses the point that 70% of Americans live in 11 'megaregions' with dozens of city pairs that all have room for improved intercity passenger rail as part of a balanced, multimodal regional transportation system.[7]

Germany also illustrates that while investments in high-speed rail are important, especially in corridors that meet the criteria for it to succeed, investments in conventional-speed intercity passenger rail can also pay big economic, mobility, and quality-of-life dividends. In addition, they can be a steppingstone or building block toward high-speed rail while providing mobility improvements and economic benefits in the meantime.

While much of my testimony is focused on improving regional corridor service, I want to convey that I am fully supportive of Amtrak's long-distance network, and not just because it is the only service we now have in Austin (only for the time being I hope). I also support it because it helps bind our nation together and provides an invaluable transportation service to hundreds of small communities throughout our nation that, absent Amtrak long-distance service, would have no other non-automobile connection to the rest of the country. Meeting national goals such as improving mobility for smalltown America is one of the main reasons we have a federal government, and it is entirely appropriate for the federal government to support Amtrak's long-distance network. That is why Amtrak's long-distance service enjoys such strong support from local elected officials of all political stripes across the nation. I also

[7] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/reports/Amtrak-2021-Corridor-Vision-060121.pdf

strongly believe that investments in these megaregion corridors can complement and bolster the long-distance services that are so important to hundreds of communities throughout our nation.

The Texas Triangle

The three transportation corridors anchored by Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio are often referred to as the "Texas Triangle."

The Texas Triangle certainly fits the bill for improved intercity passenger rail service. Indeed, I would argue that it is the lowest hanging fruit in the nation for improving intercity passenger rail service. That is why I am glad that federal agencies, Amtrak, and TXDOT are looking at intercity passenger rail investments in the Texas Triangle. They will provide an attractive and convenient option for travel between Texas cities. Just as importantly, I firmly believe it will lay the foundation for future service expansion and improvements.

Preliminary projections show that developing passenger rail service in the Texas Triangle will produce robust ridership in return for relatively modest capital investments. Given the population, population density, economy, and demographics of the Texas Triangle, that really should not come as a surprise. Even without such formal projections, the need for improved intercity passenger rail in the Texas Triangle is self-evident, and I would argue dire. The only political question is the question of political will. This should not be a partisan issue, and I hope that it will not be.

The Texas Triangle is home to 21 million people, 70% of all Texans, and is experiencing rapid population growth, accounting for 88% of Texas population growth between 2010 and 2020[8]. The region is expected to continue to grow rapidly in the coming years and decades.

- Austin (1 million people), Dallas (1.3 million people), Houston (2.3 million people), Fort Worth (956,709 people), and San Antonio (1.4 million people) are all among the 15 largest cities in the nation by population[9].
- The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington Metropolitan Statistical Area (7.9 million people) and the Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands Metropolitan Statistical Area (7.3 million people) are the 4th and 5th largest metropolitan areas in the nation, with the San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area (2.6 million people) and the Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (2.4 million people) ranked 24th and 27th.

All of these metropolitan areas are among the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation, accounting for the bulk of Texas' population growth. Indeed, the cities and metropolitan areas of the major Texas cities stand out among the nation's 175 metropolitan statistical areas for growth. Among metropolitan statistical areas, for the two-year period ending last year:

- The Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area grew by 6%, 16th fastest in the nation,
- The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington Metropolitan Statistical Area grew by 4%, the 50th fastest rate in the nation,

[8] https://www.thefutureofcities.org/the-texas-triangle-an-emerging-metropolitan-model-in-the-lone-star-state/
[9] All population figures are from the United States Census Bureau.

- The San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area grew by 3.8%, the 53rd fastest rate in the nation, and
- The Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands Metropolitan Statistical Area grew by 3%, the 71st fastest rate in the nation.

To provide more context for population growth in our state's larger regions, note that U.S. population growth during this two-year period was 0.7 percent.

Beyond its five 'top 13' cities and their metropolitan areas, the other cities and metropolitan areas located on the Texas Triangle make it an even more obvious choice for investments in improved intercity passenger rail. Indeed, in many states, those cities and their metropolitan areas would be their state's largest and most dominant. They all provide a strong population base for ridership along with institutions, such as universities, military bases, and health care facilities that would be natural trip generators for improved intercity passenger rail service.

In addition, all those metropolitan areas are also experiencing impressive population growth. For the two-year period ending last year:

- The Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Statistical Area (496,228) grew by 4.4%, the 39th fastest rate in the nation,
- The College Station-Bryan Metropolitan Statistical Area (277,824) grew by 3.5%, the 57th fastest rate in the nation, and
- The Waco Metropolitan Statistical Area (302,582) grew by 2.3%, the 92nd fastest rate in the nation.

The Texas Triangle is also one of the most economically dynamic and vibrant regions in the nation. Over the past decades, we have diversified and grown our economy and attracted

new employers from throughout the nation and the world. According to The U.S. Conference of Mayors most recent US Metro Economies report[10], Texas metropolitan areas account for 88.9% of the Texas economy. The cities and metropolitan areas of the Texas Triangle account for 74.2% of the Texas economy.

The icing on the cake of the argument for investing in improved intercity passenger rail service is that all this population and economic activity – again 70% of all Texans and 74.2% of the Texas economy – is concentrated along the three corridors of the Texas Triangle that most experts agree are the ideal distance for intercity passenger rail.

Austin is located along the western leg of the Triangle that links San Antonio, Austin, Fort Worth and Dallas. Those four cities along the 310-mile western leg are all among the 13 largest cities in the United States, with an additional 800,000 people living along that leg in Waco and Killeen-Temple. By contrast, only two of the 13 largest U.S. cities – New York City and Philadelphia - are located along the Boston-to-Washington Northeast Corridor.

As noted above, one of the benefits of intercity passenger rail is its ability to connect a wide range of destinations. Improving intercity passenger rail service on the Texas Triangle will not just improve mobility between major cities, it will improve mobility for every town with a station. People traveling between Dallas and Houston or Austin and San Antonio will certainly benefit, but people traveling from College Station to Fort Worth, from Waco to Dallas, or from Temple to San Antonio will also benefit.

[10] https://www.usmayors.org/2020/07/22/u-s-metro-economies2020-gmp-and-unemployment-forecast/

Austin's only interstate highway, Interstate 35 runs along the San Antonio to Dallas/Fort Worth Corridor. The portion of I-35 through Austin is one of the most congested highways in Texas. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport handled over 21 million passengers last year. That's nearly double the number in 1999, the year the airport opened. Each day, there are 80 airline flights along the San Antonio to Dallas/Fort Worth Corridor. Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, a less than 200-mile flight from Austin, is the most popular air destination from both the Austin and San Antonio airports. There aren't any flights between Austin and San Antonio because the distance is too short.

The San Antonio to Dallas/Fort Worth Corridor has all the attributes that drive demand for passenger rail service – four major metropolitan areas with large and rapidly growing populations, severe highway congestion, and travel distances that are too short to fly and an often unpleasantly long drive. The distance from Austin to Dallas is nearly identical to the distance from Washington to New York City. But while travelers between Washington and New York City can choose from 30 trains a day, including Acelas that make the trip in less than three hours, there is only one train from Dallas to Austin, the Texas Eagle.

The Texas Eagle is a long-distance train that begins in Chicago and ends in San Antonio. It takes more than six and a half hours to travel the 230 miles from Dallas to Austin. That's if it's on time – the Texas Eagle, which travels over 1,300 miles on freight railroad lines before it gets to Austin, is often late. And although the Texas Eagle stops in downtown Austin just a few blocks from Sixth Street, the entertainment district that has made Austin the Live Music Capital of the World and draws millions of visitors a year, most Austin residents don't even know that there's a train serving their city. Last year, Austin's Amtrak station handled fewer than 33,000 passengers.

Believe it or not, there is even less passenger rail service on the other two legs of the Texas Triangle. From San Antonio to Houston, there is a single long-distance train that operates just three times a week. And between Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth, the fourth and fifth largest metropolitan areas in the United States, there is not any Amtrak service at all. (Train advocates will often post on social media that every flight between city pairs such as these is a policy failure. It may be easy to mock these statements as hyperbole, but a little reflection can only lead to the conclusion that they have a point.)

We can do better. Every other nation in the world approaching our GDP (and indeed many that are not even close to our GDP) has invested in their intercity passenger rail system, in many cases to the point that it is the preferred or even default method of traveling between cities that are less than 500 miles apart. Even in the United States, in the places where we have made half-hearted upgrades to legacy systems, most notably the Northeast Corridor, intercity passenger rail accounts for a major share of the intercity mode share, even though those investments lag well behind those of our peer nations.

For the more than thirty million residents of Texas, the nation's second largest state, they need and deserve more passenger rail service. Our population is now growing much faster than the rest of the country and is projected to continue at this pace. In fact, the population of the Austin Metropolitan Area is expected to nearly double by 2060. Texas's overcrowded highways and many of its airports are unable to handle current travel demand, let alone the enormous increases in travel that increased population will produce. Adding enough new highway lanes to accommodate all the people who will need to travel isn't even feasible, let alone desirable. There is no reason why Austin and the rest of Texas shouldn't have the benefits that passenger rail service provides in other regions of the country.

TXDOT and Local Government Efforts

Developing the intercity passenger rail service for the Texas Triangle will require cooperation between and financial support from federal, state, and local governments. I do not doubt that our nation and our state have the resources to implement this plan. I just hope that we have the political will to do so.

On both fronts, I am pleased that the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) and other Texas leaders have worked in a bipartisan and intergovernmental manner to seize the opportunity presented by IIJA to lay the groundwork for improved intercity passenger rail service between Texas cities.

I fully support TXDOT's recent applications under the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Plan to lay the groundwork for improved intercity passenger rail on the Texas Triangle. In addition to TXDOT's efforts to leverage IIJA's historic levels of investment in intercity passenger rail and Amtrak's vision for the Texas Triangle, I also appreciate their partnership with local governments on this issue. I look forward to continuing to work with the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, and TXDOT in a bipartisan and intergovernmental manner to support intercity passenger rail investments that improve mobility and support our state's economy.

At the local level, Texas local elected officials have taken several steps to support Amtrak and TXDOT's vision for the Texas Triangle. In June, I had the opportunity to meet with Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner and his team. Later this past summer, Travis County Judge Andy Brown and I gathered a bipartisan group of local elected leaders from along the Austin-San Antonio corridor to discuss Amtrak's thinking and gain input. We invited Texas County Judges, County

Commissioners and other officials attending the Convention of the National Association of Counties that was held in Austin. Presentations were made, including by Amtrak.

On-Time Performance

I know that this Subcommittee has spent a considerable amount of time on the issue of the on-time performance of intercity passenger trains and how it can best be addressed by statute, by regulation, and by everyday operating practices, and that there has been robust debate on it. I am not an expert on this issue, but I would be remiss if I did not address it in my testimony.

At the most basic level, intercity passenger trains must demonstrate reliable on-time service to fully meet their potential as part of a multimodal regional transportation system. This is especially important in communities with infrequent service or trains that are scheduled to arrive and depart overnight.

Unfortunately, the Texas Eagle, the long-distance train that serves Austin, has what can only be described as dismal on-time performance. This situation is largely a product of forces beyond Amtrak's control. Outside of the Northeast Corridor, the on-time performance of Amtrak intercity passenger trains relies on the state of good repair and cooperation of freight railroad hosting those trains.

I appreciate the importance of our freight rail network to our economy. However, experience in other nations and indeed here in the United States shows that intercity passenger trains can run on time without unduly impacting freight operations. As Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner told the nation's mayors at The U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual Meeting this past June,

Amtrak's Empire Builder and Hiawatha services running on Canadian Pacific tracks boast enviable on-time service. As Mr. Gardner said to us:

> *"We have the largest rail network in the world, more than 50,000 miles more than the 2nd place network - China. We believe we can and should do more to with this incredible network so that it serves both people and freight better."*

I support Amtrak's efforts to address on-time performance via existing statutes and regulations via proceedings at the Surface Transportation Board, and I encourage this Subcommittee to similarly support Amtrak on-time performance. The good news is that the investments unleashed by IIJA have the potential to improve the reliability and efficiency of both passenger and freight rail if we do them correctly.

I would conclude this section by noting that even with only one train per day in each direction that almost always runs behind schedule, ridership at Austin's Amtrak station increased by 11.19% in FY 2023 over FY 2022. Imagine our ridership numbers if we had several trains per day that ran on time.

The Impact of the Pandemic on Transportation, How We Can Adapt, and the Lessons It Provides

This is perhaps the trickiest part of my testimony because I am not sure that I or any person has fully absorbed the impacts of the pandemic on transportation, nor fully developed a plan to address the lessons it provided.

However, one clear lesson is the need for redundancy and resilience in all our systems, including transportation.

Another lesson is to remain focused on the long-term and not let current headlines, especially alarmist ones, lead to rash decisions. Two years ago, we were told that cities are dead, downtowns especially so, and that the nation's white collar work force had permanently decamped to the exurbs, the mountains, and the beach, never again to be seen in cities and metropolitan areas. Well, it turns out that cities and downtowns are pretty resilient places, and that foot traffic and activity is has come back strong. That said, a lot of this new activity is not necessarily focused on office workers, many of whom will likely continue to work remotely, at least a few days a week.

In cities, that means we may have to continue to refocus our transportation system away from rush hour to more multimodal streets that better accommodate residents and intra-neighborhood travel, and, given the increase in remote shopping, better accommodate delivery vehicles. Regionally, it almost certainly means that that there will be increased demand for regional intercity travel.

As outlined above, pandemic or not, the Texas Triangle is primed for increased and improved regional intercity passenger rail service. The seeming permanence of remote work, at least for some days of the week, likely means even more demand for increased and improved regional intercity passenger rail service. I envy those regions in our nation that already have a strong baseline from which to increase and improve regional intercity passenger rail service and am eager for my region to catch up.

Returning to earlier statements about math, physics, and comparison to Europe, our economy is making demands on our regional mobility system that are driven by population growth, economic growth, and demographic changes. At the end of the day, we cannot expand our

airport capacity soon enough. We all witnessed our overburdened airports last week. It led the news coverage in nearly every market. It is easy to make fun of breathless media coverage of Thanksgiving travel woes, but there is no question that there was plenty of agony there this Thanksgiving holiday, with more to come.

But intercity rail is an option in the near term, with significant potential to add new travel capacity at less cost. As stated above, there is strong latent demand for it, and it is an untapped resource.

Let me illustrate this untapped capacity.

Austin is one of the fastest growing cities and metropolitan areas in the nation, driven by several factors but mostly due to our emergence as one of the nation's top technology centers. I looked at comparable technology areas in Europe for a comparison. The Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is nearly identical in population to the Austin region. Amsterdam's Central station serves nearly 200,000 passengers daily on 22 domestic routes and 8 international ones, with hundreds of daily trains. And, it is not even the busiest station in Holland.

Austin will certainly never be Amsterdam, nor Texas the Netherlands, but it is also true that we have the potential to serve many more people in Texas with expanded intercity passenger rail offerings to meet their travel needs.

Conclusion

The rural Texas of myth and popular imagination is a Texas I love. It is a core part of our history, culture, and identity. However, the Texas of 2023 is an urban and suburban state

with a diverse, modern economy centered on the Texas Triangle. As an elected official, I am duty bound to focus on the mobility needs of the real-world Texas of 2023 and beyond.

That is why I am pleased that IIJA provides historic levels of investment in intercity passenger rail, that federal agencies, TXDOT, and Amtrak are looking at investments in the Texas Triangle, that the Federal Railroad Administration is moving forward with its Corridor ID Program, and that state and local officials in Texas are working together to leverage both to finally bring increased and improved intercity passenger rail to the Texas Triangle. If we can work in a bipartisan, intergovernmental manner and succeed, we will provide immediate benefits to Texans and the Texas economy. Just as or even more importantly, I firmly believe it will lay the foundation for future service expansion and improvements that will allow our state and its cities and metropolitan areas to be one of the most dynamic and successful places in the nation and the world.

In closing, I would be remiss if in addition to thanking the Subcommittee, I did not thank USDOT and the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, TXDOT, other Texas state and local officials, and Texas Rail Advocates and other citizens working in support of improved intercity passenger rail service in Texas.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and for your attention to and work on this important issue.