



March 20, 2002

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman, Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad:

On behalf of the nations mayors, I am writing to urge you to support Amtrak's FY03 budget request for \$1.2 billion. We believe that a federal commitment of \$1.2 billion will enable Amtrak to maintain its current level of service. Without this critical funding many trains will have to cease operations, services will be reduced and staff decreased. In many of our cities, towns and villages, the rail system is a vital means of transportation for workers and their families.

In my own city of New Orleans, we are facing the loss of three of the fifteen long-distance trains that are slated to be eliminated. The loss of these three trains will have a significant impact on our tourism economy. The proposed cuts come at a time when our city is in the process of rebuilding our convention and hospitality industry by offering affordable and convenient ways to visiting our community. It is critical that the three long-distance trains that service New Orleans continue to operate.

The tragic events of 9-11 have forced our constituents to evaluate viable alternatives to driving and flying. It is clear that Amtrak offers such an alternative. The mayors of this nation strongly believe that the time has come to focus on the development of a balanced, multi-modal, shock-resistant, and secure national passenger rail system.

As President of the United States Conference of Mayors, I stand with my colleagues from across the nation, in seeking the reauthorization of Amtrak, the stable funding of the rail system and the development of a national rail policy. We need your leadership and support to ensure the continued growth and development of a strong inter-city passenger rail system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Morial", written in a cursive style.

Marc H. Morial
Mayor of New Orleans, Louisiana
69th USCM President

MHM:CRT:nr