Amtrak On-Board Service Improvement Plan

Introduction
In accordance with Section 222 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (Division B of Pub. L. 110-432, also known as PRIIA), Amtrak has developed and begun implementation of a plan to improve on-board service pursuant to the metrics and standards promulgated under Section 207 of the same act.

Applicable Service Metrics and Standards
Six metrics address on-board service quality, as shown in Table 1 below. The individual "service measures" track the percentages of customers who report in surveys that they are "very satisfied" with specific aspects of Amtrak's service. The standard for each category is set by the FRA, and the results are reported individually for each intercity train route that Amtrak operates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: On-Board Service Metrics and Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Measure*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amtrak Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Board Comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Board Cleanliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Board Food Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Statistics are reported separately for each Amtrak Route

Amtrak's Strategy to Improve On-Board Service
Amtrak's on-board service improvement program is guided by a strategic process that identifies issues, prioritizes responses, and employs cost-effective service solutions.

Market research on customer perspectives provides Amtrak with the passenger perspective of on-board service and identifies shortcomings that need to be addressed.

Quantified metrics are provided by the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), a database of survey responses about all aspects of the travel experience on Amtrak, including on-board service. This database allows Amtrak to establish a statistical baseline of customer satisfaction and to track the results of service initiatives in improving Amtrak's performance using a rigorous, methodological approach.


**Priorities for action** are based on customer perceptions of Amtrak gained through the *Customer Experience Research Program's* extensive market research and customer satisfaction index data.

**Financial results** are the product of increased revenues and reduced costs. Amtrak’s goal is to increase ridership and revenue by improving customer satisfaction. At the same time, through careful scrutiny and analysis of existing operating practices and targeted capital investments, Amtrak seeks to deliver its service in more cost-effective ways. The ultimate goal is a better product that delivers improved financial performance.

This report will serve to identify and summarize the programs Amtrak has already implemented and will implement in the future to deliver the desired performance improvements. The metrics and standards that measure various aspects of our progress (including onboard service and customer satisfaction) were developed as part of the process mandated by Section 207 of PRIIA. Amtrak submitted its proposals and comments regarding the 207 metrics and standards prior to the April, 2009 statutory deadline for their publication. Amtrak did not, however, wait for FRA to finalize the metrics to begin implementation of many of the initiatives outlined in its report. Consequently, several of these initiatives were underway by May, 2011.

Amtrak has begun to improve on-board service through initiatives to improve training and supervision of staff and change processes, procedures, and technologies to improve the customer experience and increase quality control. Table 2 below provides an overview of on-board service initiatives and the applicable Section 207 metrics they address. Implementation of all of these initiatives, and realization of the improvements in customer satisfaction and financial performance they are projected to generate, is dependent upon adequate levels of Federal funding for the necessary investments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index #</th>
<th>Amtrak On Board Service Improvement Action</th>
<th>Overall Service</th>
<th>Amtrak Personnel</th>
<th>Information Given</th>
<th>On Board Comfort</th>
<th>On Board Cleanliness</th>
<th>On Board Food Service</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Market Research Program: <em>Customer Service at the Front Line</em></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Market Research: <em>The Cleanliness: Barometer</em></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FY2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Market Research: <em>Food &amp; Beverage/Cafe/Lounge Research</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>FY2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Customer Satisfaction Performance Metrics Integrator (CSPMI)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2010-0 - Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Customer Service Excellence Program</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2010-0-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Customer Service Field Supervisors</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2010-1 - Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>National On Board Service Staffing Model</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>E-Ticketing</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Amtrak Fleet Strategy</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2010-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Improved Train Inspections</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2010-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Train Restroom Task Force</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Train Defect Reporting Automation</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Improving Window Clarity</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>On-Board Troubleshooting Guide</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wi-Fi</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2009-FY2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Improved Food Service Menus</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>FY2011-Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Market Research
In an effort to understand customer perception of our services, Amtrak conducted market research using focus groups and interviews with passengers. The research is summarized in a document entitled Fiscal Year 2010 Customer Experience Research. Of the five studies conducted, three (for which research was conducted between April and June, 2010) were instrumental in improvement of Amtrak on-board service:

1. **Customer Service at the Front Line** (July, 2010) focuses on customer perceptions of Amtrak’s current service delivery techniques, and the magnitude and direction of change needed within different areas;

2. **The Cleanliness Barometer** (July, 2010) identifies customer opinions about cleanliness, maintenance, and neatness across the Amtrak system; and

3. **Food & Beverage Research** (June, 2010) addresses the appearance of various food cars and the quality of food served to Amtrak’s customers.

Customer Service Management and Systems
To ensure the issues identified by our Market Research processes are addressed, Amtrak has developed a range of initiatives to deal with such disparate needs as data tracking and integration, change management, supervision, and innovation. Together, these processes will allow us to improve our awareness of the situation prevailing on our trains, to evolve strategies to deal with problems, and to bring management and the workforce together to apply their experience and understanding to the task of improving service. These improved processes will support several initiatives that are already underway to address known problems and will support efforts to implement larger technological solutions aimed at the replacement of outdated processes and the more efficient use of resources.

4. **Customer Service Performance Metrics Integrator (CSPMI)**
Amtrak’s CSPMI program is a new business intelligence system that allows managers and supervisors to closely monitor customer satisfaction with crews and train equipment, allowing Amtrak to identify and address specific problem areas and the root causes of customer dissatisfaction. This system (which can track information at the individual crew and train level) integrates customer satisfaction databases with databases that track train equipment and crew assignments, so satisfaction can be tracked by date, crew, and train equipment. Managers can also track improvements in customer satisfaction after corrective actions are taken. Amtrak expects this new approach will improve customer satisfaction with on-board service across the system. To help drive onboard customer
service improvements, CSPMI produces daily crew briefing reports that provide managers with lists of complaints and praise received from Amtrak customers since the crew's departure from their base. Managers can review these with the crew members while the incidents are still fresh in their minds. In addition, CSPMI provides managers with a monthly report that compares a route's performance by crew couplet and highlights the top-performing crew members. This is intended encourage positive competition between crew couplets, build teamwork, and identify crew couplets needing additional management coaching. The ultimate goal is an improvement in personnel-related CSI scores.

- **Implemented:** June 2011 upgraded to the Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW)

5. **The Customer Service Excellence Program**

The Customer Service Excellence Program is a companywide effort led by the Transportation Department (with strong support from the Marketing Department) to train onboard crews in crucial aspects of customer service. To draw best practices from the hospitality industries, Amtrak has begun with a pilot program on the California Zephyr route. To give an example of the practices Amtrak is adopting, employees are coached to exercise the Ritz Carlton's Three Steps of Service:

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest's name.
2. Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest's needs.
3. Fond farewell. Give a warm goodbye and use the guest's name.

A Professional Standards Committee constituted from and by Amtrak's labor forces will be created to monitor performance.

- **Implementation:** FY2011 on the California Zephyr, with other routes to follow in FY2012.

4. **Customer Service Field Supervisors**

To improve on-board service practices and customer satisfaction, Amtrak has placed supervisors aboard trains to monitor performance and address customer complaints and issues directly. The Customer Service Quality Supervisors have been in the field for a number of years. In 2009, their role has been altered, and they are now required to ride trains and coach employees on their customer service skills to improve On Board Customer Service procedures. This practice has begun on long distance trains, which operate for long periods away from terminals and have very high customer service demands. Initial indications are that personnel complaints have declined and CSI scores have improved, and Amtrak continues to monitor and track results.

- **Implementation:** FY2010 for long distance trains. There will be an increase of supervisors traveling on trains by 2012, subject to initial quantifiable success and funding availability.

5. **National On Board Service Staffing Model**

Amtrak is undertaking a comprehensive analysis of systemwide on-board service staffing levels and practices to create a national model and guidelines for appropriate and effective
staffing levels on trains, based on service function and equipment type. This will allow us to improve consistency of service delivery on long-distance routes.

- **Implementation:** FY2011 for guidelines. FY2012 and FY2013 for implementation, subject to funding availability.

6. E-Ticketing
Amtrak began the phased introduction of e-ticketing in FY 2011 on the routes noted below. This program will greatly improve ticketing, train manifest accuracy, trip management, and mechanical defect reporting. Amtrak currently relies on value-bearing paper tickets, inconveniencing customers in numerous ways. For instance, tickets cannot be easily and immediately obtained outside of staffed stations, making impromptu travel plan changes difficult, to say nothing of costs associated with lost tickets. Paper tickets also entail expensive, time-consuming and labor-intensive processes for issuance, collection, recording, and reporting; ticket counts, for example, are still done manually at a single centralized facility. Amtrak is currently deploying an e-Ticket system that will solve numerous customer service issues while improving passenger trip tracking, reporting speed and accuracy, and generation and updating of more accurate train manifests. The technology platform will also bring the capability for improved en route reporting of train mechanical defects and the automation of baggage routing is being explored.

The advantages to the customer and the company will be significant. Passengers will be able to print out boarding passes, much as they now do for airlines. Handheld cellular devices will replace the traditional pouch, uploading ticket data through a cellular connection to a computerized manifest, which will be updated in real time; it will be subject to the same connectivity challenges as any cell phone, but it will significantly improve the ability to maintain an accurate passenger manifest. It will make the sale of fare upgrades a far easier process, and will allow quicker, more efficient and more accurate reporting and analysis of ridership and revenue trends- allowing Amtrak to realize both improved revenues and reduced costs.

- **Implementation:** FY2011 pilot on Auto Train, Downeaster, and Capitol Corridor. February 2012 is the expected launch of all trains and routes.

**Train Equipment**
Amtrak is devoting resources to the task of improving the way our equipment is maintained and cleaned in an effort to make the overall travel environment appealing for the passenger. The mechanical effort, which is integrated with the data-gathering and information dissemination efforts mentioned previously, is designed to deliver those improvements. It will range from very basic improvements, such as toilet and window cleanliness (which are two of the top concerns raised by passengers and state partners), through the addition of revenue-enhancing amenities such as Wi-Fi and the design and procurement of the equipment that will replace our existing fleet.

7. Amtrak Fleet Strategy
Much of Amtrak’s fleet is more than 30 years old, and some cars are over 60 years old. Reliability, comfort, efficiency, and attractiveness will be improved when Amtrak purchases modern equipment, which is expected to improve both customer satisfaction and financial results. Amtrak has prepared a Fleet Strategy, which is available on the Amtrak website. The strategy identifies long-term needs for different types of equipment, including cars and locomotives. Amtrak is also participating in the development of specifications for new rolling stock jointly with state representatives, vendors, and the FRA.

- **Implementation**: Amtrak released its original fleet strategy in FY2010, and updated the strategy in FY2011. A total of 130 new long distance single level equipment was ordered in FY2010 and 70 new electric locomotives were ordered in FY2011. Initial delivery of the first new cars is expected in FY2012, and the first locomotive is expected in FY2013.

8. **Improved Train Inspections**
Amtrak is attempting to improve customer satisfaction by improving inspection processes to identify and correct mechanical faults before the customer experiences them. Beginning with the largest terminals (such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami), Amtrak has improved train inspections through the use of electronic forms and joint inspection procedures. Using new electronic forms that improve monitoring of performance, trains are inspected at the end of their run with the arriving train crew to identify and address mechanical faults (e.g., burned out reading lights, malfunctioning climate controls, etc.) prior to the next departure. Trains are inspected again before departure to check that systems are working correctly. To improve accuracy and accountability, inspections are conducted jointly with train crews (the front line of customer service) and the mechanical forces that maintain the equipment.

- **Implementation**: Pilot program with the Cardinal route implemented in FY2010, extended to additional routes in FY2011 and expanding on an ongoing basis.

9. **Train Defect Reporting Automation**
Amtrak is implementing a new technological system to use handheld mobile devices to report mechanical defects from the field. This program will accelerate the rate at which defects (e.g., burned out lights, malfunctioning systems) are repaired, improving the onboard experience for passengers. The automation of defect reporting has been developed as a shared application within the eTicketing program, and effects will be reportable from handheld eTicketing devices. Applications have been created to measure equipment standards (cleanliness and operation) through an automated reporting system, “eMap 21A” named after the paper form it supplants. Defects of train equipment are collected and tracked by a central database, which will provide mechanical forces with a constantly updated and highly accurate picture of equipment defect status.

- **Implementation**: Pilot program in FY2011; system wide in FY2012.

10. **On-Board Troubleshooting Guide**
While Amtrak is aggressively pursuing the strategies we have just outlined to allow us to detect and report defects, they will still arise, often when a crew is far from any mechanical facility. To improve crews' ability to address these issues on the spot (alleviating the possible need to annul the train, and minimizing passenger discomfort), Amtrak is developing a field manual for on-board staff to troubleshoot mechanical issues such as incorrect air temperature that may arise during a trip. The goal is to reduce the number of problems that can be addressed only when the train reaches a mechanical base and to improve customer satisfaction with on-board comfort.

- **Implementation**: Pilot program in FY2011; expansion in FY2012

11. Restroom Task Force

Train restrooms have long been a source of numerous passenger complaints. A typical train restroom serves hundreds of passengers each run and sometimes operates for days on the road away from terminals where waste can be pumped out and mechanical systems serviced. Amtrak has initiated a multi-department task force to improve customer satisfaction with restrooms. The new task force is drawn from mechanical, engineering, on-board service, and marketing staffs, among others. The task force is implementing new technologies, equipment, and procedures to improve odors, mechanical reliability, and cleanliness. Amtrak expects these new approaches will improve customer satisfaction with this critical component of train service.

- **Implementation**: The task force was formed in FY2011, and initial tactics have commenced. Additional improvements will follow in subsequent years.

12. Improving Window Clarity

Customer Satisfaction Index scores indicate that passengers are dissatisfied with window appearance and clarity. Train windows often get dirty en route, and windows tend to spot and streak when washed at the ends of their runs, removing the dirt, but leaving the problem unaddressed. To address this problem, Amtrak has reviewed the different car wash systems and materials that are currently in use, so that it can implement changes to the processes and materials that will improve the cleaning process to eliminate residue and improve window clarity.

- **Implementation**: Pilot program in FY2011; if successful program will expand in FY2012.

13. Wi-Fi

There has been a high and consistent demand from passengers for Wi-Fi (wireless internet access) capabilities on Amtrak trains. In response to this demand, Amtrak has successfully implemented Wi-Fi service at many of our stations and on several of our most popular services, including Acela Express. These programs have been very successful in generating additional ridership and revenue, and Amtrak is in the process of installing Wi-Fi equipment on the Amfleet cars, which are the backbone of our East Coast service. Internet accessibility will be implemented on the following timeline:

- **Implemented** - AcelaExpress, Cascades Corridor, Coast Starlight (Parlour Car only), and Downeaster.
- **November 2011** – California Services (Capitol Corridor, Pacific Surfliner, and San Joaquin)
- **Late 2011** – Auto Train lounge cars.

Trains and service not listed above will have Wi-Fi capabilities installed reliant on future funding for this project.

**Food and Beverage Service**

Food and beverage services are an important component of passenger rail service and a basic cost of doing business. With that understanding in mind, Amtrak’s goal is the provision of an attractive menu of items at affordable but revenue-maximizing prices. We are constantly reviewing and improving our menus to attain that end, and we are also implementing an onboard “Point-of-Sale” system (see item 17, below) that will eliminate the need for time-consuming on-board inventories of stock, allowing service staff to focus on the preparation and sale of meals. This system will allow us to increase the number of potential sales per employee-hour, maximizing revenue and eliminating unproductive time.

**14. Improved Food Service Menus**

Customer satisfaction with food service is based on factors such as perceived value, variety, and quality of the items available. Amtrak’s market research about customer preferences for food and beverage service has been instrumental in identifying needed improvements. Beginning in fiscal year 2011, Amtrak has been revising its menu items to improve customer satisfaction metrics established by PRIIA Section 207. Food selections have been improved, and tailored to offer customers a better value at a lower cost. For example, Amtrak hired a vendor to provide freshly made salads and sandwiches on the Acela Express service. These items have generated additional revenue, and are now being expanded to Northeast Regional services. This strategy focuses on offering a greater selection of lower-cost items to improve perceived value to the customer. Other goals include healthier menu choices, regional cuisines and flavors, improved shelf life of food stocks, and improved appearance and taste of food and beverage selections.

- **Implementation:** FY2011 - FY2013.

**15. Point of Sale Technology**

Amtrak is in the process of implementing a new onboard accounting system, called Point of Sale, to replace the manual cash registers currently used in food service cars. Inventory is currently tracked with labor-intensive manual paperwork to control stock and manage accounting. This system currently entails an opening and closing inventory of all food on the train, reducing the time that is available for food sales and forcing employees to spend valuable working time focusing on laborious accounting procedures, rather than generating revenue.
To cut the costs and improve revenues from food and beverage sales, the new system is intended to enable tracking food inventory and revenue in real time, optimizing stocks on trains, reducing inventory costs and waste, and maximizing commercial sales. Employee time will be used more effectively, and employees will be able to handle transactions more quickly and efficiently than ever before. The costs and inefficiencies associated with a labor-intensive manual accounting system will be completely eliminated, and the associated hours will be freed up for revenue-generating sales work. Amtrak expects that the Point of Sale system will contribute to food service quality while increasing cost effectiveness.

- Implementation:
  - Selected California trains in FY2010;
  - Acela Express in FY2011;
  - Cafe Cars in FY2012; and
  - Dining Cars in FY2013 subject to funding availability.
Conclusion

On-board services are an important component of Amtrak's intercity passenger rail operation. Because they are such and integral component of our service, we're committed to running them right – to improving our cost recovery, making the most productive use of our employees' time, and to implementing the technologies that will make our operations more efficient and effective.

The programs we have outlined in this report will contribute directly to such improvements, both by making the trains and the service more attractive, and by allowing employees – particularly on-board service employees – to focus less on time-consuming "housekeeping" tasks and more on revenue-generating work, such as food and beverage and ticket upgrade sales. We're also working to eliminate manpower-intensive legacy processes such as manual ticket counting. These efforts, which are in many cases overlapping and mutually supporting, are vital components of our plan to improve Amtrak's financial performance.

The programs that will deliver these necessary improvements have been years in the making, and are the tangible results of lengthy processes of research, experimentation, and iterative adaptation of existing technologies to the often unique needs of Amtrak service. Amtrak had to plan carefully to conserve the money for systems modernization during lean periods, when Federal funding was scarce, but it did so, and now it is poised to benefit from these investments. The effectiveness of programs such as e-ticketing and Wi-Fi installation will be measured in improved financial performance, higher ridership, lower costs, and improved cost recovery ratios – making Amtrak service a better product for our customers, and a better deal for the public.