

the needs of survivors and family members following an accident.

“(15) An assurance that, upon request of the family of a passenger, the rail passenger carrier will inform the family of whether the passenger’s name appeared on any preliminary passenger manifest for the train involved in the accident.

“(c) LIMITATION ON LIABILITY.—A rail passenger carrier shall not be liable for damages in any action brought in a Federal or State court arising out of the performance of the rail passenger carrier in preparing or providing a passenger list, or in providing information concerning a train reservation, pursuant to a plan submitted by the rail passenger carrier under subsection (b), unless such liability was caused by conduct of the rail passenger carrier which was grossly negligent or which constituted intentional misconduct.

“(d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

“(1) the terms ‘rail passenger accident’ and ‘rail passenger carrier’ have the meanings such terms have in section 1137 of this title; and

“(2) the term ‘passenger’ means a person aboard a rail passenger carrier’s train that is involved in a rail passenger accident.

“(e) LIMITATION ON STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section may be construed as limiting the actions that a rail passenger carrier may take, or the obligations that a rail passenger carrier may have, in providing assistance to the families of passengers involved in a rail passenger accident.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The table of chapters for subtitle V of title 49, United States Code, is amended by adding after the item relating to chapter 249 the following new item:

“251. FAMILY ASSISTANCE 25101”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. LAMPSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI).

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the bill before us, H.R. 2681, the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act. This is a bipartisan measure, and it is the product of diligent efforts by our committee chairman, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) the committee’s ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), and the Subcommittee on Ground Transportation’s ranking member, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL). I commend all of these gentlemen.

Mr. Speaker, this bipartisan bill is closely patterned on similar aviation legislation which the Congress enacted after the TWA 800 crash in 1996. This bill sets up a basic procedural framework for giving timely information to rail accident victims and their families and for dealing sensitively with the families.

The bill puts the National Transportation Safety Board in the role of the central coordinator, but relies heavily on private nonprofit organizations to handle much of the direct dealings with victims and with their families.

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Legislation is not based on any particular deficiencies in Amtrak’s dealing with accident victims. In fact, Amtrak already has begun to adopt many of the procedures contained in this bill. Rather, we want to have in place a set of proven procedures for any and all future providers of interstate intercity rail services and of high-speed rail service.

The 1997 Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act ended Amtrak’s former statutory monopoly of intercity rail passenger service, and allowed the States to choose alternative operators.

Since that law was enacted, a number of States have begun efforts to launch new conventional or high-speed rail passenger service. Therefore, we need to be prepared for a future of multiple rail passenger service providers.

This is highly effective and cost-conscious legislation. It builds on proven experience under the counterpart aviation law, and like that law, relies heavily on private, nonprofit organizations with a minimum of costs to our government.

The NTSB, for example, already has staff in place who deal with accident situations and relations with victims and with their families.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that this legislation be approved, and I reserve the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MILLER of Florida). The gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL) is recognized to control the 20 minutes of time for the minority party.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) has explained the nature of the pending measure. I would simply note that it is an important one because it recognizes the human pain and suffering associated with severe injury and loss of life that unfortunately does occur at times in passenger rail service, so I urge the adoption of the pending measure.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2681.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof), the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2681, the bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

CONGRATULATING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION FOR 25 YEARS OF COMMENDABLE SERVICE TO THE TRANSIT INDUSTRY AND THE NATION

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 171) congratulating the American Public Transit Association for 25 years of commendable service to the transit industry and the Nation.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 171

Whereas public transportation is a fundamental public service and an integral component of the Nation’s surface transportation infrastructure;

Whereas public transportation service results in productive jobs for the Nation’s workers and provides broad support for business and economic growth;

Whereas public transportation provides safe and efficient mobility for millions of people in the United States each day;

Whereas the American Public Transit Association was established in 1974 to promote and advance knowledge in all matters relating to public transportation; and

Whereas, during a period of remarkable resurgence in public transportation, the American Public Transit Association has provided a quarter of a century of service to the Nation as the professional association representing the transit industry: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress congratulates the American Public Transit Association for 25 years of commendable service to the transit industry and the Nation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI).

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity today to bring this concurrent resolution to the floor of our House. House Concurrent Resolution 171 congratulates the American Public Transit Association on its upcoming 25th anniversary.

APTA was formed on October 17, 1974, when the American Transit Association and the Institute for Rapid Transit were merged. Today APTA has over 1,200 members, including bus, rapid transit, and commuter rail systems, as well as transit suppliers, government agencies, State Departments of Transportation, academic institutions, and trade publications.

In 1997, there were 8.6 billion transit trips in the United States. Ninety percent of these trips occurred on transit systems that are APTA members. APTA has been a strong advocate for transit issues in our Nation’s capital, as well as a resource for information

and education for its member organizations.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to recognize APTA's efforts today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support House Concurrent Resolution 171, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as we congratulate APTA on its 25 years of service, I would note that while the large transit systems such as Washington Metro and BART often attract the most attention, the backbone of public transportation in this country is still the providers in small communities and rural areas.

On a daily basis in small communities across our country, many Americans rely on their local bus systems, such as what we have in Huntington, West Virginia, for their transportation needs. Indeed, the Tri-State Transit Authority is a shining example of what makes transit so important in this country, and is one of the reasons why we are commending APTA today.

I would also be remiss if I did not note that another reason why we should be honoring public transportation today is the strong presence of the Amalgamated Transit Union. This organization represents the vast majority of transit workers who daily operate the trains and buses which get people to and from work in a safe manner and their leisure pursuits, as well, and their contribution to public transportation is also being commended today.

I urge the adoption of the pending resolution, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the ranking member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

I want to congratulate the subcommittee on moving this legislation, and express my appreciation to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), for moving the bill, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Chairman PETRI), and the ranking member, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL), for their support in recognizing the American Public Transit Association on its silver anniversary year.

Mr. Speaker, it may seem unusual to be recognizing an organization of this nature on the House floor. Yet, there is nothing more important for the growth, strength, and quality of life in urban America than public transit.

I can remember very vividly as a junior staff member at the time in July, 1964, when President Johnson, on July 9, to be exact, signed into law the Urban Mass Transportation Act of that year. It was seen as an historic piece of legislation. It was the first time that the Federal Government had actually recognized the role of public transportation, transit, as it was called, or be-

ginning to be called at that time, and this small step forward was seen as an important landmark for urban America.

Not that transit had just been discovered by the Federal Government in 1964. In fact, the first transit system was actually a ferry, the Boston ferry, in the 1600s. I think the exact time was 1630 when it began its operations. The longest continually operating transit system in America is the St. Charles Line in New Orleans.

In fact, the St. Charles Line began in 1835, and runs in front of my wife's family home in New Orleans, which is also the site of the annual Mardi Gras festival. The St. Charles Line continues to operate today with upgrades and with improvements and with each of the cars filled with travelers, without which people would not be able to get to work, people would not be able to hold jobs, people would not be able to have affordable transportation in this city that is so clogged with traffic because of the nature of the city streets and the nature of the layout of the community.

Over the years our committee, then the Committee on Public Works and Transportation, now the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, has continued to support and widen the role and widen the public support for transit.

Last year Americans made 8.7 billion trips on transit. About a fourth of those took place in New York City. The New York City transit system carries 2.2 billion passengers a year. Without transit in New York and Northern New Jersey, the area would need 10,400 miles of four-lane highway, which of course is impossible in New York City, it could not be done. And even then, if we could build all that highway, we would still be able to carry only one-third of the passengers that are carried by transit in New York City.

So let us recognize here not just the 25th anniversary of APTA, formed 10 years after President Johnson signed UMTA, the Urban Mass Transportation Act, into law, but let us recognize in so doing the extraordinarily critical role that urban transit systems play in the lifeblood of America's great metropolitan areas: affordable, high-quality alternative transportation choices for commuters, for people visiting cities, reducing congestion and improving travel time for motorists, reducing air pollution, enhancing the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Here in our Nation's Capitol, the Metro system has meant vast improvement in air quality and in access for welfare-to-work, for people who live in poor neighborhoods to get to the jobs that are necessary for their livelihood.

We could do better. We could do as the metro system does in Paris, which moves far greater numbers of people, and of course, that is a 9 million population metropolitan area. But the Paris metro system, for less than half the cost of monthly transit in Washington,

D.C., moves three or four times as many people on a daily basis.

We can do better, and in TEA-21 our committee, with the support of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), made the investments necessary to carry America into the 21st century, to balance transportation. There is an 80-20 split. Eighty percent of the bill goes to highways, 20 percent to transit, and we continue the growth of investment in transit systems as well as in commuter rail, in light rail systems.

In celebrating the 25th anniversary of the American Public Transit Association, we are also celebrating the progress that we have made in improving transit systems, making them more affordable, making them higher quality, making them available to more people, and in the welfare-to-work provisions of TEA-21, we passed another historic milestone.

It is not enough to say we have ended welfare. It is more important to say we have also provided access to jobs for people. My daughter, Annie, works at Jubilee Jobs in the Adams Morgan area of Washington, where she places people who have fallen through the welfare net, who are living in homeless shelters, who come into Jubilee Jobs in their location in Adams Morgan needing work. The biggest problem is not finding the job, but marrying the person and the job with a means to get to work. The job is meaningless if you do not have money in your pocket, if you do not have a way to get to work. We provided that linkage in the welfare-to-work provisions of TEA-21.

We have made a great start on the 21st century. APTA has helped us get there. This legislation, TEA-21, has moved us forward, and with this resolution today we recognize not only the 25th anniversary of APTA, but we recognize the enormous contributions that public transit is making in the quality of life of all Americans, particularly those neediest among us who have to rely on public transportation systems to get to their work.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, House Concurrent Resolution 171.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on House Concurrent Resolution 171.