

## AMTRAK SEEKS RETROACTIVE PAY FUNDS

WASHINGTON -- Amtrak President Joseph Boardman asked Congress Feb. 17 to provide sufficient funds so Amtrak can fulfill its contractual obligation to pay agreement employees the entire amount of retroactive pay due in 2009.

Following recommendations of a presidential emergency board, Amtrak agreed in December 2008 to a wage-increase and lump sum retroactive payment package totaling \$573 million.

Because Amtrak did not have the funds to pay the entire amount in a single fiscal year, Amtrak agreed to pay it out over two fiscal years. If Amtrak could not make the payments as promised, it agreed to reopen negotiations with its unions in 2009.

Amtrak, so far, has funded some \$428 million of the \$573 million contract settlement, Boardman said, leaving a balance of \$145 million. He said Amtrak had sufficient funds to pay \$31 million of that by Sept. 30, 2009, but would have to rely on Congress for the remaining \$114 million, which he asked Congress -- in a Feb. 17 letter to Senate President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- to provide.

"At this time, the appropriations process for FY 2009 is unresolved," wrote Boardman, "but we look forward to a resolution and the availability of these funds so that we can meet our payment deadlines.

"Amtrak is committed to meeting our agreements, and holds the skills of its employees and the dedication they bring to their job in high esteem," wrote Boardman. "To that end, we are meeting and intend to continue to meet, on a quarterly basis, with the unions' leadership to ensure that we are communicating frankly and clearly with them. We hope that this will improve an already open and productive relationship."

Boardman has long been a friend of organized labor and Amtrak. In 2005, as federal railroad administrator, Boardman told Railway Age magazine, "Railroads must invest in human resources by hiring talented people and training and motivating them, as well as measuring the quality of that training and motivation to ensure incremental and continual involvement."

Prior to heading the FRA, Boardman was commissioner of New York's DOT, where he supported preservation and expansion of Amtrak service.

The 17-page Boardman letter also outlined Amtrak's plan for passenger rail growth and sufficient funding to support that growth and service improvement.

Included in his budget request are funds to install Positive Train Control on its diesel-locomotive fleet that are compatible with freight railroads, modernization and expansion of its passenger-car fleet, and a minimum of \$580 million in operating subsidies "to sustain [Amtrak's] current level of operations."