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Statement on Severe Weather Amtrak Cancellations

During the early morning hours of Friday December 1, an unusually severe winter storm descended on southern Illinois. The storm caused severe damage in an area stretching from St. Louis to Normal, IL. Downed trees and power outages caused a service suspension on the Chicago - Springfield - St. Louis railroad corridor.

This section of the corridor is owned and maintained by the Union Pacific Railroad. The line is dispatched from the Union Pacific's corporate headquarters in Omaha, NE.

Given the level of damage, it is not surprising that Amtrak service was disrupted on Friday. However, it is unacceptable that service was suspended on Saturday and Sunday.

Not too long ago, railroads could be depended upon to be the all-weather transportation mode. In addition to owning a very robust infrastructure, railroad companies commanded sufficient emergency resources and personnel to keep trains running even when air and highway transportation were seriously disrupted. Ill-conceived federal policies have forced the railroads and Amtrak to reduce these emergency resources. Although their technology is fundamentally more robust than that of air and highway, the railroads no longer have the staff or budgets to operate their infrastructure when it is under duress.

Given the gross failures in federal policy, the Midwest High Speed Rail Association calls upon each of the Midwestern governors to develop and fund infrastructure programs that will give railroads the tools and incentives they need to operate fast and dependable passenger trains. Particular attention should be given to creating the infrastructure that can provide a high level of value on a daily basis while being easily converted to assist in emergency relief.

We call especially upon Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich to identify the root causes of this failure and then work closely with Amtrak and the Union Pacific Railroad to use the Chicago – Springfield – St. Louis corridor as a showcase for new policies that will make the railroads willing and able to operate passenger-train service that can be depended upon in any emergency.

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association is a member-supported non-profit educational organization promoting the development of fast, frequent and dependable train service connecting the entire Midwest. Our members include business leaders, mayors and individuals that want the option of traveling by train.