

WILMINGTON, N.C., February 19, 1968.

Congressman HARLEY O. STAGGERS,
House Office Building,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN STAGGERS: I have received notice from the Clerk of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce that hearings will begin tomorrow on legislation pertaining to passenger train service jurisdiction. I do not have enough time to make plans to come to Washington and testify before your committee and so I would like to have my letter of October 25, 1967, and this letter entered in the record of this hearing. I am enclosing five (5) copies of each as the notice of hearing stipulates. These are my own views. I represent only myself.

Since writing you back in October, the passenger train situation has worsened. Almost daily the newspapers carry stories of trains being discontinued. This crisis begun back in 1946. After the war the nation went back on a peace time basis and quite naturally the number of people using rail transportation declined. Some railroads made attempts to keep this business, but others seeing an opportunity to get out of the passenger business for good begun to trim their schedules. At this time there were about 10,000 passenger trains operating in the country. Today there are about 750 and the number is steadily declining.

I have always believed that the railroads could get any business they went after. They have proved this in the freight business, but their efforts have not been sincere enough to get the passenger business and hang onto it. The railroads that have made an honest effort to get the business have suffered because the railroads which have not wanted the business and took off their trains reduced the connections available to the traveler.

Canada had the same problem with its railroads and several years ago passed a law making it almost impossible to discontinue passenger trains. The result was the Canadian railroads when they saw that they had to make these trains pay. Passenger trains in Canada that were showing a loss are now making a profit.

The facts are that the railroads offer a transportation service which cannot be duplicated by any other mode of transportation. If properly worked out they could furnish a service that would enable the customer to take his car along on a trip. You can eat and sleep on the train. It is safe transportation. Many people prefer to ride the train, and this is not based on sentiment for most.

Concerned citizens like myself have in community after community tried to save this passenger service. Wilmington is a prime example of this and the result. After the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad petitioned the N.C. Utilities Commission to discontinue Trains 42 and 49 to and from Wilmington the local protest took the form of resolutions from the Wilmington City Council and the New Hanover County Commissioners. The Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce along with these two governing bodies objected to the planned discontinuance. The railroad lost before the Utilities Commission and the railroad filed an appeal to the Interstate Commerce Commission. Between these two actions the local Transportation Committee met with the President of the railroad, Mr. W. T. Rice, to see what they could do to save the trains. They asked him point blank what they could do, and offered to do anything they were asked. In other words they were going to do what the railroad should have been doing, going out after the business. They were told point blank to go soak their heads. Nothing would be done to try to get more business for the trains.

This has been repeated many times by many railroad presidents, vice presidents, and lesser officials in many communities throughout the country. I think that what is needed is a law that will first of all stop all discontinuances, and second one which will require the railroads of the nation to place back in service all passenger trains operating on January 1, 1957. This is the half way mark in the decline of passenger service in the United States. Something must be done soon, for even as I type this letter, the railroads are busy scrapping passenger equipment, and tearing down passenger stations.

Very truly yours,

CHARLES B. PEGRAM.