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June 27, 2023

Mr. Stephen J. Gardner
Chief Executive Officer
Amtrak
1 Massachusetts Ave, NW
Washington, DC, 20001

Re: Niagara Falls International Railway Station

Dear Mr. Gardner:

I write today to ask that you prioritize efforts to improve the passenger experience, decrease travel time, and enhance services on Amtrak's *Maple Leaf* passenger trains operating between the United States and Canada. Built in 2016, the state-of-the-art Niagara Falls International Railway Station in Niagara Falls, New York is designed to expedite inspections and provide a faster, higher-quality service for passengers traveling across the U.S. – Canada border. Utilizing this station to its full intended potential would dramatically increase cross-border ridership.

As a requirement set forth by Congress in Section 22212 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Amtrak compiled the *Report on Amtrak Cross Border Operations*. Congress mandated this report to improve cross-border services and ease restrictions that hinder rail travel between the United States and Canada. This report rightfully acknowledged the inefficient train service between Western New York and Toronto. On the *Maple Leaf*, passengers on both sides of the border are required to disembark with their luggage for inspection, making the process burdensome and time-consuming for riders. Inspections at the older, low-level, and uncovered Niagara Falls, Ontario stop can be especially unpleasant when there is inclement weather. While the enclosed, high-level platform, the Niagara Falls, New York station was specifically designed to accommodate Canadian inspections. The report suggests, "*Consolidating the two current operations into one location would expedite border inspections, and Amtrak stands ready to facilitate the necessary discussions among the involved parties to explore such a possibility.*"

Toronto is Canada's largest city and a global hub of finance and culture. Canadian citizens travel to Western New York to experience our cultural institutions, visit restaurants and retail destinations, and cheer on our professional sports franchises, and vice versa. Western New York and Southern Ontario are integrated, and both regions' economies and life quality benefit from our close proximity to each other, if travel between our nations is not overly restrictive. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 Pandemic has reduced cross-border travel. From 2019 to 2022,

foot and vehicle traffic are down nearly 50 percent at the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Ports of Entry. Since 2000, the number of train passenger crossings decreased by 80 percent.

Amtrak Connects US, Amtrak's long-range planning document, proposes enhanced passenger rail service between Toronto, Ontario and Western New York. This would be a positive step in fulfilling that vision. I urge Amtrak to work with relevant parties, including the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), Transport Canada (TC), and VIA Rail to consolidate inspections at the Niagara Falls International Railway Station in the United States for passengers on the *Maple Leaf*.

With thoughtful coordination, we can reduce travel time, improve the passenger experience, increase ridership, and build stronger cross-border economies. Now is the time to get this done. I stand ready to assist in the United States Congress.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

CC:
Mr. Troy Miller
Senior Official Performing Duties of the Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20229

Mr. Amit Bose
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
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The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
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