



January 29, 2016

Joseph H. Boardman  
President, Amtrak  
National Railroad Passenger Corporation  
60 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Boardman:

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), I am writing with some concerns about Amtrak's pilot program allowing pets onboard trains traveling along the Northeast Corridor and New England. AAFA, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1953, is the leading patient organization for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. AAFA is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with asthma and allergic diseases through education, advocacy, and research.

Currently, more people than ever are struggling to live normal and healthy lives in the face of the daily limits that asthma and allergic diseases present. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25 million Americans have asthma<sup>i</sup> and 50 million have allergies<sup>ii</sup>. Allergies to pets with fur are common, especially among people who have other allergies or asthma<sup>iii</sup>.

There is no cure for either asthma or allergic diseases; rather, patients are only able to protect their health by managing their environmental and behavioral conditions. Allowing pets to ride in coach cars will expose all passengers to pet dander, even when the pet is riding in an enclosed carrier. Cat and dog allergens can become airborne and can remain in the air and on surfaces even when the pet is no longer present. For train passengers who are highly sensitive to pets, airborne allergens can be enough to trigger a severe allergic reaction or an asthma attack, both of which can be life-threatening and require immediate medical attention.

For many Americans at risk for severe allergic reactions or asthma attacks, Amtrak is often considered a safer alternative to flying: the environment is less restrictive, exposure to allergens and triggers is easier to avoid, and medical attention is more obtainable. An Amtrak policy allowing pets to travel on all coach cars will be a serious health hazard to these passengers, and further limit their ability to travel.

While AAFA recognizes the value in providing a service that allows passengers the option to travel with their pets, we believe that the health and safety of passengers with asthma and allergies must be prioritized. If Amtrak were to designate a reasonable number of cars as "pet-free", passengers with allergies and asthma would be able to reduce their chances



of coming in contact with any pet dander allergens. A pet-free car would allow both pet owners and passengers with asthma and allergies to travel by Amtrak, while protecting the health and safety of those with chronic health conditions. Pet-free cars would demonstrate Amtrak's commitment to accommodating all Americans with safe transportation. We strongly urge Amtrak to take this proposal under consideration, and we are available to discuss further if necessary.

Please feel free to contact me at [csennett@aafa.org](mailto:csennett@aafa.org), or Meryl Bloomrosen, AAFA's Vice President, Policy, Advocacy and Research at [mbloomrosen@aafa.org](mailto:mbloomrosen@aafa.org).

Sincerely,

Cary Sennett, MD, PhD  
President and CEO

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Asthma FastStats. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/faststats/asthma.htm> Published 2015. Accessed January 13, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Allergies. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainment/tips/allergies.html> Published 2011. Accessed January 13, 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. Pet Allergy. Available at: <http://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/allergies/pet-allergy.aspx> Published 2016. Accessed January 13, 2016.