



## **Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen**

A Division of the Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

### **Transport secretary denies administration wants to 'kill' Amtrak**

(The following story by Hank Schaller appeared on The Daily Oakland Press website on March 25. Brother Greg Powell is Chairman of the BLET's Michigan State Legislative Board.)

DETROIT -- U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta denied Thursday that the Bush Administration has a hidden agenda of wanting to kill the Amtrak passenger rail system, including the three trains that now make daily round trips between Pontiac and Chicago.

"Those who claim the president and I are out to kill Amtrak should stop writing press releases," said Mineta, who spoke at the downtown Detroit Amtrak station to drum up support for what he called an Amtrak reform proposal.

Mineta said a plan to establish 50-50 federal matching grants for state investments in passenger rail infrastructure, such as stations, trains and track, are "the key to revitalizing passenger rail travel in America."

These matching grants would give states a powerful incentive to invest in better tracks and more reliable equipment, making trains more popular and profitable, and allow Amtrak to focus its efforts on running the trains on time, he said.

However, listening to Mineta was a skeptical audience, filled with passenger rail supporters,

outnumbering the news media present, who said financially troubled Michigan simply can't come up with the matching funds that Mineta was talking about to improve Amtrak.

"To me, this reform plan is delusional," said Ed McArdle, conservation chairman for the Southeastern Michigan Sierra Club. "Michigan and most other states are in terrible financial shape and hoping for private investors is just a way of killing Amtrak."

That view was echoed by Clark Charnetski, a board member and former chairman of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, and Bishop Bill McCullum, past vice president of a faith-based group called Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength, also known as MOSES, which has lobbied for years for better public transit in the Detroit area and improved passenger rail service.

"It would be difficult to get any more money from any of the states where Amtrak operates," Charnetski said.

Waterford Township resident Greg Powell, state legislative chairman of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which represents the 25 Amtrak engineers in Michigan, was even more harsh in his criticism.

"As far as we are concerned, President Bush just wants to bankrupt Amtrak," Powell said. "What would be better is if the federal government came up with a subsidy large enough for Amtrak to be run effectively. The way Amtrak is subsidized now is like a Band-Aid."

**Monday, March 28, 2005**  
[bentley@ble.org](mailto:bentley@ble.org)

<http://www.ble.org/pr/news/headline.asp?>

**id=13129**

© 2004 Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and  
Trainmen

**<http://www.ble.org>**