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LaTourette/Oberstar Amendment to Restore Amtrak Funding

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the LaTourette/Oberstar amendment that would restore funding for Amtrak. The Fiscal Year 2006 Transportation Treasury, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill that we are debating today cuts funding for Amtrak to $550 million, half of its current funding level. Without increasing the funding level to $1.2 billion, Amtrak will be unable to survive and will be forced into bankruptcy.

In recent years the Administration and some members of Congress have repeatedly proposed significant cuts in Federal funding for Amtrak. They seem determined to eliminate this vital transportation service, and justify these actions by demonizing and blaming Amtrak for all of its problems. These opponents of Amtrak often forget that the Federal government subsidizes our nation's airports, roads, sidewalks, and even its bicycle paths. Why should it treat our national rail system differently?

Like the 25 million people that rode Amtrak in 2005, I appreciate the essential public service Amtrak provides. I am a frequent rail passenger, as are many of my constituents in Central New Jersey. In fact, 4 million New Jersey residents rode Amtrak last year, and many New Jersey commuters ride Amtrak or use their infrastructure daily.

The loss of Amtrak would impact more than my constituents and other patrons across the nation who depend on its convenient service. Those customers that rely on Amtrak will be forced to descend on our already heavily congested roads and airports. These demands on our roadways will accelerate the loss of open spaces that will be paved over in order to construct new roads. The additional congestion will increase pollution in urban environments that already suffer from the ill effects of smog.

Furthermore, the economic impact of eliminating Amtrak should not be overlooked. In New Jersey alone, at least $200 million in annual revenues would be lost from the newsstands, convenience stories, cafes, and other retail businesses that are located near the rail lines and that count upon daily commuters for much of their cashflow. This economic dependence on Amtrak is similar along the Northeast Corridor, in cities across the Nation and in rural areas that depend on the train passing through their town.

I am disappointed that the Administration and some members here in Congress fail to recognize the benefits of Amtrak. I hope that the majority of my colleagues will appreciate the importance of Amtrak on America's transportation infrastructure and support the LaTourette/Oberstar amendment that will keep Amtrak running.