AMTRAK OFFICE *of* INSPECTOR GENERAL
NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION

More effective track outage planning and coordination would help Amtrak achieve infrastructure repair goals

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WASHINGTON – Amtrak has built a more disciplined process to plan and coordinate major track outages, but more steps could be taken to reduce service disruptions and maximize the amount of time it has access to tracks, Amtrak's Office of Inspector General found in a report released today.

According to the report, these additional steps include institutionalizing multi-year planning, updating planning tools, and clarifying the roles of departments that coordinate the outage plan with affected external stakeholders like commuter railroads.

Amtrak estimates that it will cost about $31 billion over the next decade to bring its tracks, bridges, and other infrastructure on its Northeast Corridor into a state of good repair. Such repairs help ensure the reliability and safety of trains running on the corridor but can require tracks to temporarily be taken out of service to accommodate the work. Ineffective track outage planning can negatively affect Amtrak's ability to achieve its state of good repair goals, which impacts revenue, customer service, and its relationships with external stakeholders, the report said.

The OIG credited Amtrak for implementing new procedures to prioritize capital projects and identify and plan for track outages necessary to complete them. Additionally, the report noted that the company meets regularly with external organizations whose service is affected by Amtrak's track outages.

Amtrak does not, however, plan for track outages beyond one year. The company cited the unpredictability of future federal funding it receives on an annual basis for not developing a multi-year plan, according to the report. The planning gap limits Amtrak's ability to ensure that foreman and trained equipment operators are available to support the work and may result in financial losses for Amtrak if it cancels an outage. Additionally, annual plans limit the company's ability to take advantage of completing multiple tasks for each outage. For example, work that could be done concurrently, like concrete tie replacement and signal work, are done sequentially instead which leads to more service disruptions.

The OIG also found that Amtrak employees rely on manually intensive processes that require data to be pulled from 12 different systems and software tools to build the plan. This limits the company's ability to efficiently use available data to drive the plan and make timely updates.

Additionally, at least five departments are involved in coordinating the outage plan with commuter railroads and other external organizations, but Amtrak has not clearly laid out each department's unique role, the report said. This has led to confusion and inconsistencies with external stakeholders about where to go for information, with whom they should communicate, for what purpose, and the extent to which a department is to solicit planning input.

The OIG made three recommendations to Amtrak that would help the company provide more effective planning and coordination of track outages. More details are available in the full report located on the OIG's website: https://direc.to/eC3n.

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