OIG highlights lessons learned to strengthen Amtrak's rolling stock acquisitions

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WASHINGTON – Amtrak's ongoing multi-billion-dollar investments in new trains present significant opportunities to improve customer service—but applying "lessons learned" from prior OIG oversight work could help strengthen how it manages these complex acquisitions, according to an Amtrak Office of Inspector General report released today.

According to the report, Amtrak is undertaking the three largest rolling stock acquisitions in its history—including the approximately $1.5 billion NextGen Acela program, the roughly $3.6 billion Airo program, and a multi-billion-dollar long distance fleet replacement effort. These investments "represent a generational opportunity for the company to increase ridership and modernize the passenger rail experience," the report said.

The new report drew on a 13-year series of prior OIG reports and industry and government practices to identify 10 lessons that could inform Amtrak's ongoing efforts. Those lessons highlighted areas where stronger planning, coordination, and oversight could reduce risks to cost, schedule, and performance.

For example, aligning fleet acquisitions with supporting infrastructure upgrades at maintenance facilities could help ensure the company can operate new trains and capture expected revenue. The OIG previously reported that Amtrak's facility planning lagged fleet planning by about 15 years and found that some facilities may not be ready to service new trains, potentially delaying revenue capture as new equipment may intermittently sit idle.

The report also said that developing well-supported business cases, engaging stakeholders early, and establishing realistic requirements could help the company better manage tradeoffs and avoid costly changes or delays later in the process. In prior work, the OIG found that insufficient stakeholder engagement on the Airo program contributed to late design changes, leading to a $42.5 million change order and a five-and-a-half-month delay in the initial delivery of the first trainsets.

The report further noted that developing realistic requirements and strengthening program management frameworks—including risk management, scheduling, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities—could help the company coordinate complex, multi-year efforts more effectively. In prior work, the OIG reported that Amtrak's long distance fleet replacement strategy faced at least a two-year delay after the company pursued infeasible design requirements, even though it no longer had sufficient rolling stock to meet demand and continued removing aging equipment from service.

Establishing measurable performance standards and conducting rigorous oversight of train quality and functionality before acceptance could also help reduce the likelihood of defects, service disruptions, and additional costs, the report said. The OIG previously found that planning and oversight deficiencies in the NextGen Acela program contributed to multi-year delays, cost increases, and continued reliance on aging equipment.

The report also noted that the company was not yet using the signature tilting system designed to improve trip times and passenger comfort and that the trainsets were not achieving the faster speeds and shorter trip times specified in the contract. In addition, the new trainsets have experienced mechanical and quality issues in service. On at least two occasions, for example, side exterior panels that came loose and contacted a third rail, causing significant damage, including a fire in the East River Tunnels near New York Penn Station on May 14, 2026.

Finally, the report emphasized the importance of managing the full lifecycle of rolling stock, including assessing the condition and longevity of legacy fleets and maximizing the use of maintenance and parts contracts to improve reliability and control costs. In prior work, the OIG reported that Amtrak removed its entire Horizon fleet from service after identifying extensive structural corrosion on multiple units, requiring the company to quickly reassign equipment from other routes and negatively affecting service and timetables across portions of its network.

The report acknowledged that the company has made progress in recent years, including strengthening aspects of its program management capabilities. It further noted that incorporating these lessons into acquisition processes and internal controls could help the company build on these improvements and better position its current and future rolling stock programs for success.

More information is available in the full report: https://direc.to/o   V.

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