

Marion C. Blakey, Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC HEARING

Re: Derailment of Amtrak's California Zephyr on March 17, 2001
Request for Public Hearing

Dear Chairman Blakey:

I am a concerned citizen aware of the tragic death of Stella Riehl, a passenger aboard the Amtrak California Zephyr which derailed near Nodaway, Iowa on March 17, 2001. This was a completely preventable occurrence and it is my sincere desire to see that no other loved one suffers the senseless tragedy that has befallen the Riehl family.

It is widely known that defects not allowing the signal horn to operate, mandated the passenger train to slow at crossing points prior to the site of derailment. This was a blessing in disguise as the California Zephyr had slowed to pass a crossing and had not been able to increase in speed greater than the reported 52 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Had the passenger train been traveling at the allowable 79 miles per hour, unencumbered, many more lives would have surely been lost. Other families, friends, and solemn citizens with no relation to the Riehl family, would also be gripped with great sorrow over the loss of the precious lives of their loved ones.

In light of the recent events of September 11, 2001, more than ever, the American people are turning to the railroad, and specifically Amtrak for safe travel. With dramatically increased ridership, the potential for such a catastrophic event is also dramatically increased.

I believe that it is the right of the American people to know the circumstances, probable cause and issues of safety relating to the California Zephyr derailment so that the appropriate measures will be implemented to prevent such an occurrence in the future.

**I URGE YOU TO CONDUCT A PUBLIC HEARING INTO THE MARCH 17, 2001
DERAILMENT OF THE AMTRAK CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR SO THAT THE AMERICAN RAILROAD
PASSENGER CAN KNOW THE TRUE STATE OF RAILROAD TRACK IN THE UNITED STATES
AND WHAT IS BEING RECOMMENDED TO IMPROVE IT.**

It is my understanding of the facts known to date that the rail involved in the March 17th derailment contained metallurgical defects from the manufacturing process. It is unclear to me, and others, as to the location and/or disposition of the other rails forged from this defective heat of material. This question needs to be addressed publicly.

In addition to any questions relating to the specific defective heat involved in this accident, sworn testimony needs to be taken from the raw material manufacturer, the forger (Bethlehem Steel) and the track owner (BNSF) as to what procedures are in place to inspect and test for metallurgical defects, and how in the future we can prevent defective track from passing through the raw material manufacturer, the forger and the track owner undetected.

In the last ten years alone, several significant derailment accidents of Amtrak trains have occurred due to defective track conditions. These include the following:

On December 20, 1998, the Amtrak Texas Eagle derailed and injured 12 passengers and 10 train personnel. In the Board's report it found that the cause of the accident included defective track conditions and cited the track owner, Union Pacific, for inadequate oversight of track maintenance.

On August 9, 1997, the Amtrak Southwest Chief derailed near Kingman, Arizona injuring 173 passengers and 10 train personnel. As a result, the NTSB made recommendations to the track owner, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, to make various changes to its track inspection program that would prevent similar accidents.

On January 13, 1997, the Amtrak Train No. 25 derailed near Granite, Wyoming, injuring 20 passengers and 4 train personnel. The cause of the accident was attributed to a broken rail which had been improperly welded by the track owner, Union Pacific.

On August 3, 1994, Amtrak Train No. 49 derailed near Batavia, New York, injuring 108 passengers and 10 train personnel. The cause of the accident was defective track (flattened rail head) owned by Conrail.

On July 31, 1991, the Amtrak Silver Star derailed in Lugoff, South Carolina killing 7 and injuring 87 while operating over track owned and improperly maintained by CSX Transportation.

The above list does not include the many other incidents involving other trains which occurred as a result of defective track over which Amtrak operates its trains.

The National Transportation Safety Board is responsible for investigating, determining probable cause, making safety recommendations, and reporting the facts and circumstances of railroad accidents in which there is a fatality, or that involve a passenger train. The investigation toward the tragic accident involving Amtrak's California Zephyr calls for a public hearing.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Signed _____ Dated: ____/____/____

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State Zip: _____