

Moorman: Amtrak CEO Tenure Will Be Short

By [Bill Stephens](#) | November 21, 2016



Wick Moorman, Amtrak president and CEO

NEW YORK — Wick Moorman says he does not have a long-term future at Amtrak. Moorman took the top spot at the national passenger railroad in September.

“My wife has told me that,” Moorman said at a conference on Thursday.

Moorman’s goals at Amtrak include making the company highly efficient, developing a stronger safety culture, and finding the right executive to lead the company over the long term.

“Amtrak’s not broken. There are things to be fixed,” Moorman says, likening the railroad to an old house that needs tender-loving care but not radical change. “Think of me as the plumber,” he says.

Moorman retired as CEO of Norfolk Southern in mid-2015 and stepped down from the freight railroad's board of directors on Dec. 31, 2015. He and his wife moved to Charlottesville, Va., to be closer to their children and grandchildren in retirement.

Then Amtrak called, asking for help finding a new CEO after Joseph Boardman announced he would be step down. One thing led to another and Moorman was offered the job. He said, “no,” but relented after the Amtrak board persisted in asking for his help.

“To my wife’s absolute disgust...I agreed to take the job,” Moorman says, noting that “disgust” probably was not a strong enough word.

“I am not doing this for the money,” says Moorman, whose salary is \$1 per year. “I am doing this because the future of Amtrak is important to this country.”

Moorman has brought in a few fellow NS retirees, including former Chief Operating Officer Mark Manion, to help him make the company more efficient. It’s easier to get lawmakers and others behind Amtrak when it is efficient and well-managed, Moorman says. And by becoming more efficient, Amtrak can reduce operating losses while providing better service, he says.

Amtrak is safe, and getting safer, Moorman says. “But there’s still work to be done go build a stronger safety culture,” he says.

Amtrak has a lot of great people who work hard and believe in the company’s mission, Moorman says. He will listen to their suggestions while developing training programs that aim to make on board service more consistent.

The railroad needs to focus on its product, which is tired and frayed in places due, in part, to its aging equipment and belt-tightening that led to coaches being cleaned less frequently, Moorman says.

Replacing the railroad's worn fleet of P42 locomotives can be done relatively quickly. But there's no quick solution to replacing Amfleet I and II equipment, which needs a funding source and a new design. "We want to nail down what the cars should look like first," Moorman says.

The replacement for Acela Express train sets, announced in August, will be a game-changer for high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor when delivery begins in 2021. "It's going to be a better product in every way," Moorman says.

Long-distance trains are the system's "political glue" and are essential for underserved areas of the country, Moorman says.

The railroad understands the growth opportunity of its regional trains as well as state-supported services in shorter corridors, Moorman says. They are particularly attractive compared to the hassle of flying and dealing with airport security. "Amtrak's bag fees are very low," Moorman quipped. "And, you'll hear this in our marketing, there's no middle seat."

Adding new regional service will require cooperation from Class I host railroads. Moorman aims to improve the partnership and dialogue between Amtrak and each of the Class I systems. Moorman wants, for example, NS chief dispatchers to know Amtrak operating officials so that they can solve problems together.

Moorman spoke at the RailTrends 2016 conference, sponsored by analyst Anthony Hatch of ABH Consulting and the trade publication Progressive Railroading.