

# Locked Doors, High Speeds, and Loaded Guns: A Disaster Waiting to Happen on America's Rails

## OP-ED

**By Jared Cassity, SMART Transportation Division's National Safety & Legislative Director**

On April 30, 2026, the Associated Press published an article titled, "Amtrak may make it easier to bring guns on its trains despite the alleged attempt on Trump's life." In it, the article lays out a White House request (possibly even a demand) for Amtrak to amend its firearm policy to make it easier for passengers to travel with guns. According to the reporting, Amtrak intends to comply with the ask and is entertaining the inclusion of *lockboxes* on all of its trains for the transportation of weapons. The burden will be placed onto our members serving as conductors and assistant conductors on every Amtrak train to enforce the declaration and storage of the firearms, and to act as the keeper of the keys, if you will, making them the only thing standing between a passenger and their gun. (For scope, AP highlights that this proposal could expand firearms access from a limited number of trains with checked baggage service to more than 1,500 trains a day, including routes used by roughly 750,000 passengers daily just in the Northeast Corridor alone.)

While SMART TD was not aware of the extent to which Amtrak was considering this request, we have, for a very long time, been concerned with the lack of security on America's passenger trains. Nowhere is this more evident than our fight against the growing number of assaults on onboard crews and station personnel. And while one is too many, little is being done to correct the dozens, if not hundreds, of attacks that happen annually against our members and other union crafts, which makes this proposal to encourage the presence of more weapons especially problematic.

But, perhaps, even more troubling for me is that the plan has seemingly not changed, even in light of the attempted White House Correspondents' Association dinner attack that took place last weekend.

According to authorities, Cole Tomas Allen traveled by train from near Los Angeles, CA, to Chicago, IL, then from Chicago, IL, to Washington, D.C., with a 12-gauge pump action shotgun and a .38 caliber handgun that he purchased in California, and the intent to do harm. Knowing that airline transportation would be difficult, given TSA security and strict carrier firearm policies, Allen chose to take the train, where he knew he would not meet any friction points with the firearms in his possession.

But what's even more frightening is that he is not alone. Just ask our members working those trains, because lurking in the darkness, and extremely under-reported, is the reality and the frequency with which train personnel encounter passengers with undeclared, improperly concealed weapons. And while not all possess intent to do harm, some do... and have. (Note: our members cannot publicly speak to these instances, as they would likely be disciplined and/or terminated.)

This is exactly why we have been pressing on Amtrak to do more and calling on Congress to take action. Because the reality is that Amtrak cannot fix this alone. It will take funding and legislation to see meaningful change, something only Capitol Hill can provide. But to now see that the railroad is poised to encourage the transportation of more guns, even in light of the attack, it is not only evident that commonsense has left the discussion, it is imperative that we find a solution to protect the traveling public and improve the security of this critical national service.

Now, I suspect some might take this as an anti-2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment piece. It is not. I firmly believe in a person's right to responsibly own and carry a firearm. In fact, I, too, am a gun owner and an avid hunter. And while I miss more than I hit, I enjoy being in the woods, the frustration of losing at sporting clays, and spending some time on the range. But more than anything, I enjoy the camaraderie that goes along with it. Something not true for just me, but also US Army veteran and SMART TD President Jeremy Ferguson and many of my fellow Union officers.

As a union, I believe us to be pragmatic when it comes to this discussion, because we understand the value of gun rights, and also the reality of confined rail cars moving at high speed with locked doors, crowded aisles, the availability of alcohol, and no viable exits when a situation turns violent.

Conductors are the only true line of defense.

It does not take much anymore for a basic situation to escalate into something it never should have been. This is especially true for our members simply trying to do routine work. Collecting fares, enforcing policy, addressing overcrowding, protecting handicapped accessible seating, and trying to keep trains safe can all serve as flashpoints. Add to it the fact that passengers know they have weapons on board, where they are located, and who has the keys, and it's not hard to figure out that you have a recipe for disaster.

Requiring conductors, or any worker for that matter, to collect and store guns from all passengers will not solve the problem. It will only create new dangers and situations for conductors in which they're ill-equipped.

Our members are trained to operate trains, protect and assist passengers, and de-escalate conflict. They are not armed security officers, nor should they be. Requiring them to manage, secure, or potentially confront an angered passenger attempting to improperly access their gun, is a bridge too far (and to be frank, an asinine notion). We have documented cases where our conductors have been brutally assaulted for asking passengers not to smoke or to make a seat available for others. How do we see that going when we ask them to disarm unwilling passengers?

Allegedly, in his planning, Cole purposefully chose to travel by train with the intent of killing the President of the United States. In doing so, he crossed state lines with an assortment of weaponry, and he did so with ease. If that does not give policy and rule makers pause, then what will?

SMART-TD has worked with our Bus and Transit Assault Prevention and Safety (BTAPS) Committee, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and lawmakers to reduce assaults on transportation workers. We have pushed for de-escalation, better reporting of assaults, stronger penalties, and real prevention. This proposal, in an instant, could erase all of that progress.

Our members do not want the “thoughts and prayers” of members of Congress after a conductor, assistant conductor, onboard service worker, or passenger is killed by an onboard threat. They want them to listen **now** to their cries for help. Something can and must be done before it’s too late.

Amtrak needs to stand up and reject this request, take politics out of the equation, demand a better safety environment for its passengers and workers, and Congress needs to give them resources to do it.

SMART-TD is the largest rail labor union in America, and I want it on the record that we will fight this proposal with every tool at our disposal.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jared Cassity". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jared" being more prominent than the last name "Cassity".

Jared Cassity  
National Safety & Legislative Director