AMTRAK TRANSPARENCY ACT

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BACKGROUND:

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has allocated $66 billion in guaranteed funding for Amtrak, but there are concerns about the lack of transparency within the company. Despite being funded by taxpayers, Amtrak's Board of Directors conducts closed-door meetings without adhering to the Government Sunshine Act, denying public access and failing to publish minutes or transcripts. In addition, there are financial concerns, including reports of large bonuses for top executives amidst financial losses and decreased ridership. Amtrak's lack of transparency extends to vendor agreements with state partners as well. The agreements fail to provide clear explanations of cost breakdowns, leaving state sponsors and rail partners in the dark about their financial commitments.

BILL SUMMARY:

The proposed Amtrak Transparency Act aims to address these concerns by introducing measures to enhance transparency and accountability within the company. The legislation would:

- Expand board meeting requirements to include representatives from state-sponsored and long distance routes, and Amtrak passenger groups.
- Mandate compliance with federal open meeting requirements, requiring a public notice at least 30 days prior.
- Require disclosure to Congress of bonus payments exceeding $50,000 to Amtrak employees.
- Mandate disclosure of vendor agreements and associated costs over $250,000, facilitating informed decision-making by states and rail groups.

ANALYSIS:

The Amtrak Transparency Act represents a crucial step towards improving transparency and accountability within Amtrak, addressing longstanding concerns about closed-door decision-making. By broadening stakeholder engagement and mandating transparency in board operations and financial disclosures, the bill seeks to restore public trust in Amtrak's governance and financial stewardship. With support from key stakeholders, including state-sponsored rail systems and transportation associations, the legislation presents an opportunity for bipartisan cooperation in advancing accountability measures within the transportation sector. It underscores the need for robust oversight of taxpayer-funded initiatives, aligning with broader efforts to ensure efficient and accountable use of public resources.

