

## EDITED LETTER (2015):

*Other than the need to correct several dozen or more misspellings and poor word-choices based on faulty phonetics and misunderstandings of meaning, and to make just as many shuffles of baffling syntax, this correspondence holds up in terms of relevance. It is less jarring to the modern ear and common sense than feared. And yet, it retains the inexperience, foolishness, and passion of youth. (Dude, this letter might sound silly as all get-out, but at least in my early twenties I got interested in something in the world and tried to do something about it.)*

April 22, 1973

Congressman Dan Kuykendall:

I had hoped for optimistic news concerning progress in restoring passenger rail in the South. But it appears that the only journalistic reports have been those registering the various complaints of Amtrak clientele who have given the rail its chance but, in lieu of improvements, feel that they have been coerced into traveling by automobile, bus, or plane, contrary to their wishes. The trains, they protest, are unreliable and badly appointed; the facilities are ancient; and there is a profusion of unwarranted abuse from the operating staff. For instance, one woman from Dallas, who conceived that the train could be the most inexpensive and pleasurable mode of transportation, wanted to travel with her child from Dallas to New Orleans; but due to the infrequent runs, thus an ill-timed scheduling, which entailed a night's layover in Houston, and the fact that, although there were few passengers on the train, the conductor refused to take her luggage on board, which was in slight excess of the specified limits, the railroad repulsed another potential customer.

This is one struggle I am confident deserves to be waged with much investment of time, money, and forethought. The revival of passenger rail elicits the prospect of more extensive and felicitous travel, and it promises solutions to many of the nation's problems, such as reducing automobile congestion, alleviating fuel scarcity, providing jobs for laborers and engineers, and serving as alternative work for the production capabilities of corporations like General Motors in designing and building better rail transport. The average American traveler will not buy second-rate products. The railways have to be allowed the funds to streamline equipment and services, even at the cost of initial operating losses. They must and will attract the volume, but only if nursed to competitive strength. Many of the stations are in rundown, precarious areas of cities, areas not frequented by the majority of citizens; they may need to be relocated, or at any rate, they must become the sort of places with which people are familiar and comfortable. A good idea would be to lease portions of the improved station buildings to restaurants, bakeries, and shops, and to emphasize the nostalgic heritage of America's once-mighty arteries of travel and commerce.

I know that in an individualistic-oriented society, such as ours, it is difficult to synchronize interests. I understand that efficient, equitable solutions are often delayed and eventually arrived at only after tedious argument and the battle of butting heads with stacks of paper, committees, and the immovable lethargy of the unimaginative. I concede that necessary success can only follow lucidity, honesty, and determined action – often against the popular grain and the barricades of waste erected by vested interests. But if the goal is to best achieve the fruition of individual needs and aspirations, it is worth working to surmount these obstacles, accepting compromise while moving forward toward shared solutions.

The sole Memphis rail terminal is a painful sight. Memphis' grandest, Union Station, having been destroyed a few years ago, we are left with Central Station on the nearly abandoned south end of downtown Main Street. Its waiting rooms echo with empty wooden benches; trees and weeds grow in disdainful triumph between the ties and rails of long-disused tracks.