

August 11, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Martin Oberman, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Amit Bose, Deputy Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg, Chairman Oberman and Deputy Administrator Bose:

President Biden pledged to “make sure that America has the cleanest, safest and fastest rail system in the world—for both passengers and freight.” Similarly, the President’s request for FY 2022 discretionary funding seeks to spark the “Second Great Rail Revolution.”

We applaud the Administration’s focus on the critical role railroads play in U.S. transportation as one of, if not the safest and most efficient means for moving people and goods over land. Indeed, railroads are a tool for meeting many of the nation’s goals—from continued economic recovery and meeting future freight demand to reducing net greenhouse gas pollution and tackling the climate crisis.

A recent study from the Northwestern University Transportation Center (NUTC) on freight rail performance during the COVID-19 pandemic found that railroads were “an essential component of pandemic resilience, demonstrating a high level of adaptability to meet consumer and business demands.” Freight railroads nimbly handled supply-chain disruptions and helped stabilize the intermodal market when highway transport could not. They did so without the government support required by other transportation modes.

This resilience is the direct result of decades of private spending on rail infrastructure, technology, and operations. In recent years, that spending has averaged \$25 billion a year—more than most state transportation departments spend on highways—producing a rail network that supports jobs, takes trucks off the road and eases the burden on publicly funded roadways.

We joined over 1,000 local and national leaders, including eight former U.S. Secretaries of Transportation, in signing the attached letter to the Surface Transportation Board last fall to celebrate the balanced system of economic regulations put in place by the Staggers Act of 1980. This transformational legislation, which then-Senator Biden supported, allowed railroads to earn enough revenue to make the investments that gave America the world’s best freight rail system by productivity and cost. Customers today pay about 44% less on average than they did before Staggers passed.

What's more, freight railroads are three to four times more fuel efficient than trucks, translating to 75% fewer greenhouse gas emissions for freight that moves by rail rather than by highway. This distinction is significant as we work to minimize carbon emissions from the transportation sector. While railroads move roughly 40% of long-distance freight (measured by ton-miles), they account for less than 2% of U.S. transportation-related emissions.

Investment in new technologies and operating practices has also improved on rail's inherent efficiency. Railroads in 2020 used 675 million fewer gallons of fuel and emitted 7.6 million fewer tons of carbon dioxide than they would have if their fuel efficiency stayed the same since 2000.

We underscore these points to show how important healthy railroads are to our communities and local companies. The nation needs railroads to continue supporting our economy going forward.

Even before the pandemic, freight demand was expected to rise 40% by 2045. COVID-19 placed new stresses on supply chains, accelerated economic trends toward e-commerce and made nimble, responsive logistics networks even more important. To meet economic needs disrupted during the pandemic, maximize returns on expected infrastructure legislation, and secure long-term economic growth while meeting the moment on climate change, we need freight railroads to do even more.

As you implement legislation and craft regulations, please ensure freight railroads are able to continue their record of robust investments, eliminate incentives that subsidize less efficient modes over railroads and avoid double standards that hold railroads back from continued innovation.

Sincerely,

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CC: Members of the Surface Transportation Board



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October 14, 2020

Ann D. Begeman, Chairman
Martin J. Oberman, Vice Chairman
Patrick J. Fuchs, Board Member
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

Dear Chairman Begeman, Vice Chairman Oberman and Board Member Fuchs:

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the Staggers Rail Act. We write to urge the Board to maintain the balanced underlying economic framework that has been the bedrock of your decisions and ensure that no actions you take undermine the ability of freight railroads to reinvest in the rail network.

Any action inhibiting freight rail investment would threaten economic development and quality of life in our communities, precipitate job losses in the rail supply and contracting sectors, and undercut safety, efficiency and productivity across the rail network, affecting all railroads, small and large.

As you know, the Staggers Act established a visionary approach to regulation that sparked a freight rail renaissance and continues to provide measurable benefits to businesses, consumers, taxpayers and our economy.

This landmark, bipartisan legislation was necessary because decades of rigidly prescriptive federal overregulation had decimated the U.S. freight rail network. Bankruptcies were commonplace, rail rates were rising, safety was deteriorating, and rail infrastructure and equipment were in increasingly poor condition because railroads simply could not earn enough to pay for basic upkeep, let alone innovation and improvements.

Since the implementation of a balanced system of economic regulation under the Staggers Act, which protects rail customers while allowing railroads to manage their assets and pricing, U.S. freight railroads have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in the rail network. Rail traffic has doubled, rail productivity has more than doubled, rail rates are down more than 40 percent, and recent years have been the safest on record.

Freight railroads' massive, post-Staggers investments in infrastructure, equipment and technology transformed a failing rail system into a high-tech, highly efficient, interconnected network that links American communities, businesses and consumers to markets across the country and around the world.

This is important to us and to our country. Every ton of freight moved by rail promotes economic development, mitigates pollution, eases worsening highway congestion and saves taxpayers money. Railroads are four times as fuel efficient as other modes of transport and emit 75 percent fewer

greenhouse gases. Additionally, railroads do not require the significant public spending that subsidizes other modes.

Railroads are in the midst of revolutionary technological innovation as they adapt to meet changing customer demands and maintain their status as the safest, most efficient way to move freight over land.

We implore the Surface Transportation Board to preserve the delicate regulatory balance created by the Staggers Act, allowing freight railroads to innovate, adapt and reinvest in the rail network. Our communities, our businesses and our employees depend on it.

Sincerely,

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San Angelo Chamber of Commerce
San Angelo, TX

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Shelby County
Center, TX

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Sommerville Companies
Dallas, TX

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Southlake, TX

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Temple Chamber of Commerce
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Port Arthur, TX

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State Representative, District 2
Texas Legislature
Van, TX

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State Representative, District 125
Texas Legislature
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State Senator, District 12
Texas Legislature
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President & Founder, Americans for Less Reg.
Lehi, UT

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Tyler Economic Development Council
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All Aboard Washington
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Spokane, WA

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Spokane, WA

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Sumner, WA
Sprague Chamber of Commerce
Sprague, WA

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Fayette County Commission
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Huntington, WV

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Kanawha River Railroad
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Charles Town, WV

Jim Shaffer
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Raleigh County Commission
Beckley, WV

Town of Fayetteville
Fayetteville, WV

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Wayne County
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Wayne County
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Morgantown, WV

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West Virginia Legislature
St. Marys, WV

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Letart, WV

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Keyser, WV

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West Virginia Legislature
Falling Waters, WV

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West Virginia Legislature
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Wisconsin

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Chilton, WI

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East Wisconsin Rail Consortium
Belgium, WI

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Potosi, WI

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Highway Commissioner
Grant County
Lancaster, WI

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Platteville, WI

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La Crosse County Highway Department
West Salem, WI

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Town of Burke
Burke, WI

Vernon County Highway Department
Viroqua, WI

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Village of Bristol
Bristol, WI

Wisconsin County Highway Association
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Wisconsin Legislature
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State Representative, District 3
Wisconsin Legislature
Harrison, WI

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Two Rivers, WI

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Wisconsin Legislature
Marshfield, WI

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State Senator, District 21
Wisconsin Legislature
Racine, WI

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State Representative, District 6
Wisconsin Legislature
Bonduel, WI

CC: U.S. Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
U.S. House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure