

May 20, 2026

Dear Members of Arizona's U.S. Senate and House Delegation:

As Congress works on surface transportation reauthorization, the undersigned Arizona stakeholders urge you to support a performance-based, data-driven approach to freight rail policy and to avoid prescriptive operational mandates that could undermine the safety, efficiency, and affordability of the freight rail network that so many Arizona communities and businesses depend on.

Freight rail is vital to Arizona's economy, local governments, and our role as an international trade hub. Nearly 30 million tons of freight move through Arizona each year on privately maintained rail infrastructure, supporting key industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, energy, and logistics. Railroads connect Arizona to markets across North America, including Mexico and the West Coast, enabling goods to reach consumers efficiently and reliably.

This system also keeps costs down for families and businesses. By moving goods more affordably than other modes, freight rail helps reduce inflationary pressures and prevent cost spikes for food, fuel, and construction materials. At a time when affordability is top of mind for many Arizonans, rail's role in keeping supply chains stable is more important than ever.

Unlike other transportation modes, railroads fund their infrastructure privately, investing billions every year in track, bridges, technology, and safety systems. In 2023 alone, Class I railroads reinvested \$26.8 billion nationwide to maintain and modernize the rail network. These investments have driven steady improvements in safety. Since 2005, mainline accident rates are down 43%, total train accidents by 33%, and hazardous materials accident rates by 80%, with more than 99.99% of hazmat shipments arriving without incident.

Unfortunately, some proposals under consideration in the reauthorization process would undercut this progress. One-size-fits-all operational mandates may sound appealing, but in practice they reduce flexibility, delay innovation, and could raise costs without improving outcomes. Among the most concerning ideas are technology mandates that restrict the use of advanced tools like automated track inspection, which can spot defects more accurately and earlier than manual checks alone. Staffing mandates would also override long-standing collective bargaining agreements and impose inconsistent standards compared to other transportation sectors adopting automation.

Rather than improving safety, these proposals would add red tape, slow down progress, and drive more freight to highways raising wear and tear on local roads, increasing traffic, and shifting infrastructure burdens to Arizona's cities and counties.

We ask Congress to protect what works. Arizona's economy relies on rail to connect producers to markets, support jobs, and help families afford everyday goods. A regulatory framework that encourages continued private investment, allows railroads to innovate, and maintains flexibility will best serve Arizona communities - both urban and rural- for the long haul.

Sincerely,

Thomas Murphy
Mayor
City of Sahuarita

Mae Peshlakai
State Representative
Arizona State Legislature

David Coolidge
City Manager
City of Winslow

John Kavanagh
Senator
Arizona State Legislature

Jon Thompson
Mayor
City of Coolidge

Tom Armstrong
Mayor
Chino Valley

Tammy Ontiveros
Supervisor
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Lisa Garcia
Deputy Town Manager/Town Clerk
Town of Florence

Lisa Fitzgibbons
Mayor
City of Casa Grande

Nikki Check
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