April 13, 2026

The Honorable Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation
United States Senate and House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation,

As Congress considers surface transportation reauthorization, the undersigned Florida business, economic development, and local government stakeholders urge you to support policies that preserve a performance-based, data-driven framework for freight rail safety and operations—and to reject prescriptive mandates that would undermine the efficiency and reliability of our rail network.

Freight rail is a cornerstone of Florida's supply chain and a pillar of our state's role as a national and global logistics hub. Sixteen freight railroads move tens of millions of tons of goods each year across more than 3,000 miles of track, connecting Florida's expanding manufacturing base and agricultural producers to major gateways like JAXPORT, PortMiami, Port Everglades, and Port Tampa Bay. Rail helps shift freight off congested highways like I-95, I-4, and I-75, reducing infrastructure strain and supporting statewide economic growth.

At a time when local governments face rising infrastructure costs, freight rail remains a rare example of privately funded and maintained infrastructure. Railroads carry about 40% of intercity freight and invest over $20 billion annually nationwide into their networks—relieving pressure on public transportation budgets. Freight rail also strengthens supply chain resilience and helps ease inflation by keeping goods moving efficiently and reducing volatility in shipping costs.

As you develop reauthorization legislation, we respectfully ask that you:

1. Oppose Unnecessary Operational Mandates: Florida's economy depends on flexible, reliable freight rail service. Proposals like crew size or train length mandates would reduce efficiency, raise costs, and shift freight to highways. Railroads already operate under strict federal oversight and invest over $23 billion annually into infrastructure and safety technologies. These investments are working—the train accident rate is down 43% since 2005 and 11% since 2023, while the hazmat accident rate per carload is at its lowest ever.

2. Sustain and Expand Federal Rail Grant Programs: Grants like the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) and Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) grants help Florida communities address safety challenges—especially at crossings—and improve mobility. Recent awards have supported grade separation and crossing upgrades in Jacksonville,

Miami, Tampa, and along key corridors. These grants stretch federal funds by leveraging private and local investment and are essential to keeping Florida's rail system safe and efficient.

Support Data-Driven Safety Innovation: Outdated regulations can unintentionally block newer, safer technologies. Tools like automated track inspection detect infrastructure defects earlier and more accurately than manual inspections, improving both safety and efficiency. Yet, inflexible rules that lock in older methods may limit the deployment of such innovations. Florida's communities benefit when federal policies enable—not inhibit—the use of proven and emerging safety tools that keep railroads ahead of risks.

Freight rail remains one of our nation's most effective infrastructure systems—strengthening supply chains, reducing public costs, and supporting long-term competitiveness. We urge you to advance policies that allow freight rail to continue delivering for Florida's families, communities, and economy.

Sincerely,

Bill Braswell
Commissioner
Polk County

Joy Cooper
Mayor
City of Hallendale Beach

Ed Hooper
Senator
Florida State Legislature

Cindy Jantomoso
President
Haines City Economic Development

Chip LaMarca
Representative
Florida State Legislature

Bob O'Malley
Commissioner
Orlando Economic Partnership

Sean Parks
Commissioner
Lake County

Shalonda Warren
Commissioner
City of West Palm Beach

JB Whitten
Mayor
City of Crestview

Don Willis
Council Member
City of Cape Canaveral