

June 7, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chair, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sharice Davids
Vice Chair, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
1541 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Donald Payne
Chair, Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials
106 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Crawford
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials
2422 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Vice Chair Davids, Chair Payne and Ranking Member Crawford:

As Congress works to complete legislation providing much-needed investment in infrastructure, fostering continued economic recovery and addressing the threat of global climate change, freight railroads are a key part of the solution. Every ton of freight moved by rail strengthens the economy, supports jobs, mitigates pollution and saves taxpayers money.

Freight railroads invest their own private capital into maintaining and upgrading their infrastructure and technology while other modes require taxpayer assistance. Freight railroads were the only mode of transportation that did not seek government assistance during the pandemic.

Because a train can carry the load of several hundred trucks, railroads ease burdens on the nation's highways and bridges while also reducing congestion and emitting 75% fewer greenhouse gas emissions per ton-mile. As the greenest way to move freight over land, railroads account for approximately 40% of U.S. intercity freight while emitting only 2.1% of transportation-related emissions.

Freight railroads are safe and getting safer. By all measures, the last decade has been the safest in railroad history.

In short, freight railroads are essential to the nation’s economy and to combating climate change, especially with freight demand expected to rise 30% by 2040. As such, we believe any infrastructure package must enable continued robust private sector investment in freight rail.

Specifically, when considering infrastructure legislation, Congress should include the following policies:

- **Restore the Highway Trust Fund.** Railroads both compete with trucking companies over freight and count them among their biggest customers. Highway congestion and deficient infrastructure hurt the entire intermodal network. To ensure a robust and solvent Highway Trust Fund (HTF), Congress should base HTF funding on a “user pays” principle. When general fund monies are used to pay for roads and bridges, and when heavy trucks are allowed to operate without paying the full cost of their impact, highways are incentivized for freight movement.
- **Improve Partnership Opportunities.** Increasing funding for highway-rail grade crossing projects and discretionary grant programs enable the public sector to improve highway safety along railroad crossings and to partner with freight railroads to advance projects of mutual interest. Congress should increase funding for these activities.
- **End Modal Inequity.** Freight rail is the safest, most efficient and most environmentally sustainable way to move freight over land. Less efficient modes of transportation receive federal subsidies in the form of artificially low fuel taxes as well as incentives to automate their operations to improve network fluidity and safety. Congress should implement a vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) fee – that also factors in vehicle weight – to ensure heavy trucks pay their full infrastructure cost. Policymakers should also avoid prescriptive operational requirements on railroads, like minimum crew size mandates, that would not improve safety but would limit innovation and competitiveness.
- **Provide Amtrak Funding.** A reliable passenger rail network is the most environmentally friendly mode for moving people over land and is a critical connector both in dense corridors and across rural areas. Congress should provide funding for Amtrak and state-supported passenger routes to maintain and replace current critical infrastructure.
- **Preserve Balanced Economic Regulation.** Balanced economic regulation has allowed freight railroads to pour nearly \$740 billion of their own money – not taxpayer dollars – back into the rail network since 1981. Congress should avoid changes that would threaten rail investment and undermine the ability of railroads to help the nation meet other policy goals.

Thank you for your leadership and for your continued attention to the role of freight railroads in supporting a robust and sustainable economic recovery.

Sincerely,

Hon. Tomeka Butler
Mayor
City of Eudora
Eudora, AR

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Mayor
City of Hoxie
Hoxie, AR

Hon. Paula Summers
Mayor
City of Sulphur Rock
Sulphur Rock, AR

Hon Allen Brown
Mayor
City of Texarkana
Texarkana, AR

Jessica Gunn
Executive Director
Clarksville/Johnson Co. Chamber of Comm.
Clarksville, AR

Kirk Billingsley
President & CEO
Forrest City Area Chamber of Commerce
Forrest City, AR

John Owens
President & CEO
North Little Rock Chamber of Commerce
North Little Rock, AR

Deanna Kupcik
President & CEO
Buckeye Valley Chamber of Commerce
Buckeye, AZ

Robert Heidt
President & CEO
Glendale Chamber of Commerce
Glendale, AZ

Jeffrey Campos
President & CEO
Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce
Goodyear, AZ

Raoul Sada
President & CEO
Surprise Regional Chamber of Commerce
Surprise, AZ

Rex Hime
President & CEO
California Business Properties Association
Sacramento, CA

California Business Roundtable
Sacramento, CA

Hon. Oscar Madrigal
Councilmember
City of Oxnard
Oxnard, CA

Kelly Asper
Owner
Construction Network
Long Beach, CA

John Stashik
Treasurer
El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce
El Cerrito, CA

Jeremy Harris
President & CEO
Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce
Long Beach, CA

Theresa Harvey
President & CEO
North Orange Co. Chamber of Comm.
Orange County, CA

Hon. Lisa Bartlett
Supervisor
Orange County
Orange County, CA

Reuben Franco
President & CEO
Orange Co. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Orange County, CA

Bill Manis
President & CEO
San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership
San Gabriel Valley, CA

Peter Rodgers
Executive Director
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments
San Luis Obispo County, CA

Hon. Jim Spering
Supervisor
Solano County
Solano County, CA

Hon. Eric Garcetti
Mayor
City of Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA

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Representative, District 93
Florida House of Representatives
Lightpoint, FL

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Taveres, FL

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North Miami
North Miami, FL

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Duluth, GA

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Suwanee, GA

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Georgia House of Representatives
Auburn, GA

Hon. Billy Mitchell
Representative, District 88
Georgia House of Representatives
Atlanta, GA

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Representative, District 42
Georgia House of Representatives
Smyrna, GA

Hon. Emanuel Jones
Senator, District 10
Georgia Senate
Decatur, GA

Hon. Matt Wells
County Board Chairman
Christian County
Taylorville, IL

Hon. Jeffrey Sherwin
Mayor
City of Northlake
Northlake, IL

Clark Kaericher
Executive Dir. Technology and Infrastructure
Illinois Chamber of Commerce
Springfield, IL

Hon. Edgar Gonzalez, Jr.
Representative, District 21
Illinois House of Representatives
Summit, IL

Hon. Emanuel "Chris" Welch
Speaker
Illinois House of Representatives
Westchester, IL

Hon. Terri Bryant
Senator, District 58
Illinois Senate
Murphysboro, IL

Hon. Dennis Buckley
Mayor
City of Beech Grove
Beech Grove, IN

Mark Fisher
Chief Policy Officer
Indy Chamber
Indianapolis, IN

Bruce Chladny
Executive Director
Kansas Association of Counties
Topeka, KS

Hon. Tom Burroughs
Representative, District 33
Kansas House of Representatives
Kansas City, KS

Hon. Valdenia Winn
Representative, District 34
Kansas House of Representatives
Kansas City, KS

Hon. Leo Delperdang
Representative, District 94
Vice Chair, House Transportation Committee
Wichita, KS

Stoney Bogan
Director of Business Development
Northeast Johnson Co. Chamber of Comm.
Mission, KS

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Senator, District 20
Kentucky Senate
Shelbyville, KY

Hon. Sal Santoro
Representative, District 60
Kentucky House of Representatives
Florence, KY

John Sita
Director
Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers
New Orleans, LA

Daniel Erspamer
CEO
Pelican Institute
New Orleans, LA

Hon. Sharon Middleton
Councilwoman
City of Baltimore
Baltimore, MD

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Mayor
City of Laurel
Laurel, MD

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Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD

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Maryland House of Delegates
Prince George's County, MD

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Delegate, District 32
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD

Hon. Pamela Beidle
Senator, District 32
Maryland Senate
Baltimore, MD

David Ross
President and CEO
Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce
Duluth, MN

Hon. Patrick Boyle
Commissioner
St. Louis County
Duluth, MN

Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
Kansas City, MO

T'Risa McCord
Interim President & CEO
Kansas City Economic Development Corporation
Kansas City, MO

Tony Robyn
Director
MOKAN Partnership
Joplin, MO

Glenn Eagan
Commissioner
Shelby County
Shelbyville, MO

George Zsidisin
Director
Supply Chain Risk and Resilience Research Inst.
St. Louis, MO

Hon. Butch Lee
Mayor
City of Brandon
Brandon, MS

Hon. Virgi Lindsay
Councilwoman
Jackson City Council
Jackson, MS

Dr. Jameson Taylor, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President for Policy
Mississippi Center for Public Policy
Jackson, MS

Hon. Lynn Wright
Representative, District 37
Mississippi House of Representatives
Columbus, MS

Shari T. Veazy
Executive Director
Mississippi Municipal League
Jackson, MS

Hon. Dennis Sullivan
Mayor
Borough of Somerville
Somerville, NJ

Hon. Derek Armstead
Mayor
City of Linden
Linden, NJ

Hon. John Amodeo
Commissioner of Public Safety
City of Margate
Margate, NJ

Hon. James Kennedy
Assemblyman, District 22
New Jersey General Assembly
Rahway, NJ

Hon. Nicholas Chiaravalloti
Assemblyman, District 31
New Jersey General Assembly
Bayonne, NJ

Hon. Jamel Holley
Assemblyman, District 20
New Jersey General Assembly
Union, NJ

Hon. Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr.
Senator, District 18
New Jersey Senate
South Plainfield, NJ

Michael Egenton
Exec. Vice President, Government Relations
New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce
Trenton, NJ

Chip Hallock
President & CEO
Newark Regional Business Partnership
Newark, NJ

Hon. Stavros Anthony
Mayor Pro Tem
City of Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV

Michael Oates
President and CEO
Hudson Valley Economic Development Corp.
Poughkeepsie, NY

Ryan Silva
Executive Director
New York State Economic Dev. Council
Albany, NY

Maureen Halahan
President & CEO
Orange County Partnership
Goshen, NY

Hon. Michael Welch
Commissioner
Board of Ashland County Commissioners
Ashland, OH

Zakee Bashir
Manager
Columbus Region Logistics Council
Columbus, OH

Ray Hexamer
CEO
Stark Economic Development Board
Canton, OH

Avery Pickard
Executive Director
Oregon Economic Development Association
Portland, OR

Tim Atkinson
Vice President of Sales
Stimson Lumber Company
Portland, OR

John Murray
President
The Willamette Valley Company LLC
Eugene, OR

Hon. Patrick Catena
President
Allegheny County Council
Pittsburg, PA

Helen Kissick
President & Executive Director
Beaver County Chamber of Commerce
Beaver, PA

Jeff Palm
Executive Director
Mechanicsburg Chamber of Commerce
Mechanicsburg, PA

Hon. Greg Rothman
Representative, District 87
Pennsylvania General Assembly
Camp Hill, PA

Amy Sturges
Director of Governmental Affairs
Pennsylvania Municipal League
Harrisburg, PA

Hon. Paul Sommerville
Vice Chairman
Beaufort County Council
Beaufort, SC

Krista Atyeo-Gortmaker
Executive Director
Grant County Development Corporation
Milbank, SD

Beverly Robertson
President & CEO
Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce
Memphis, TN

Hon. Richard Briggs
Senator, District 7
Tennessee Senate
Knoxville, TN

Hon. Becky Massey
Representative, District 60
Tennessee House of Representatives
Knoxville, TN

Hon. Andy Eads
County Judge
Denton County
Denton, TX

Paul Mayer
President & CEO
Garland Chamber of Commerce
Garland, TX

Lance LaCour
President & CEO
Katy Area Economic Development Council
Katy, TX

Ken Malcolmson
President & CEO
North Dallas Chamber of Commerce
Dallas, TX

Chris Wallace
President & CEO
North Texas Commission
Irving, TX

Peter LeCody
President & CEO
Texas Rail Advocates
Dallas, TX

Andrea H. Reay
President & CEO
South Seattle Chamber
Seattle, WA

Hon. Victoria Woodards
Mayor
City of Tacoma
Tacoma, WA

David Schaffert
President & CEO
Thurston County Chamber of Commerce
Olympia, WA

Lora Butterfield
President & CEO
Fife Milton Edgewood Chamber of Comm.
Fife, WA

Daniel Fedderly
Executive Director
Wisconsin County Highway Association
Madison, WI

Tara Doyle-Enneking
President & CEO
Puyallup Sumner Chamber of Commerce
Puyallup, WA

Hon. Gary Tauchen
Representative, District 6
Wisconsin State Assembly
Bonduel, WI

CC: Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee