

April 13, 2026

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

Dear Members of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation,

As local leaders from across Tennessee, we urge you to support freight rail in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, recognizing it as a vital pillar of our state's economy, infrastructure, and supply chain.

Tennessee is a logistics powerhouse. From global cargo moving through Memphis—the world's largest air cargo hub—to automotive manufacturing in Middle Tennessee, advanced manufacturing across the I-65 and I-75 corridors, and agricultural production in West Tennessee, freight rail is a backbone of the state's economy. With 2,600 miles of freight rail track and access to multiple Class I and short line railroads, rail connects Tennessee businesses to ports, population centers, and international markets. It also helps relieve pressure on heavily traveled interstate corridors, reducing congestion, improving safety, and limiting wear and tear on taxpayer-funded highways.

Unlike most infrastructure systems, freight rail is privately funded. Railroads invest billions of private dollars each year to maintain, modernize, and expand their networks. That investment model delivers public benefits without shifting costs onto Tennessee taxpayers, while preserving limited federal and state transportation dollars for other critical infrastructure priorities.

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

Oppose unnecessary operational mandates.

Tennessee's economy relies on efficient freight rail. Mandates on crew size or train length would raise costs for businesses and consumers without proven safety gains. Freight rail is already the safest surface freight mode, with train accident rates down 43% since 2005. Tennessee needs policies that support performance—not rigid rules that slow commerce.

Sustain and expand federal rail grant programs.

Federal programs like Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) and Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) grants are delivering real benefits to Tennessee communities. In West Tennessee, TennKen Railroad received \$7.37 million to upgrade 43 miles of track, improving service for manufacturers and ag shippers. TDOT also secured \$23.7 million

to repair 40 aging rail bridges across multiple counties. Continued funding is vital to modernizing rail infrastructure and supporting economic growth.

Support safety innovation.

Tennessee communities benefit when federal policy supports the use of modern rail technologies. Tools like automated track inspection, predictive maintenance, and advanced monitoring improve early defect detection, protect workers, and enhance reliability. Policy should accelerate—not hinder—the adoption of proven innovations.

Freight rail supports jobs, strengthens supply chains, reduces highway congestion, and improves long-term competitiveness. We urge you to advance policies that allow Tennessee’s rail network to continue delivering results for local communities, businesses, and the national economy.

Sincerely,

Aftyn Behn
Representative
Tennessee General Assembly

Terri Holmes
Commissioner
City of Red Bank

Joe Brooks
County Mayor
Clairborne County

Dennis Hunt
County Mayor
Coffee County

Josh Brown
President & CEO
Tennessee Chamber of Commerce &
Industry

Randall Hutto
Mayor
Wilson County

Gary Davis
County Mayor
Bradley County

Becky Massey
Senator
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Ron French
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Ken Moore
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Brian Peery
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Danny Waggoner
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