

February 9, 2016

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development and Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development and Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development and Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Price
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development and Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Diaz-Balart, and Ranking Member Price:

The undersigned represent the Rail Customer Coalition (RCC), a large and diverse group of trade associations and businesses from the manufacturing, distribution, energy and agricultural industries that depend on reliable and affordable rail service to do business in the United States. As the House and Senate begin work on their respective FY 2017 THUD bills, we are writing to support additional funding for the Surface Transportation Board (STB or Board) in the appropriations process to help ensure that the Board has adequate resources to meet its statutory mission.

The STB is responsible for the economic oversight of the entire freight rail industry, which involves not only large and resource-intensive rate cases, but hundreds of smaller decisions and actions. The STB was reauthorized by Congress last year for the first time in 20 years, when Public Law 114-110, *The Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization Act of 2015*, was signed into law on December 19, 2015. This law recognized the need for the STB to become a more efficient and effective body. Chairman Shuster noted that the reforms were included to “allow the STB to run more efficiently... it is going to get these rate [cases] to the STB faster and get us through that process quicker. That is extremely important.” Given the new requirements and new responsibilities the Board will now assume, including the addition of two new Board members, it is imperative that this small but important agency is funded at least to the very modest levels authorized under the new law.

Key proceedings before the STB on rules have moved at a glacial pace – not advancing to a proposed rulemaking after nearly 5 years – due in part to resource constraints as the Board considers extensive data and comments provided by stakeholders. The STB is the only venue for

rail customers to seek resolution of rate and service issues and, unfortunately, many rail customers will not go to the STB because history has shown that their issues will not be dealt with in a timely fashion.

At a Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing last year, STB Board Member Deb Miller highlighted an issue that has long concerned many members of the RCC. The STB computer system is antiquated to the point where the system engineers can no longer provide many services. The STB website is also inadequate, largely due to constraints presented by outdated computer networks. We support additional funding to support upgrades that would enhance the efficiency of the agency. The STB must have adequate staff and resources to meet its statutory mission.

The RCC members support additional funding for the Board in the Appropriations process, and look forward to working with the Committees to find solutions to the challenges faced by the Board.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association

Alliance for Rail Competition

Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers

American Chemistry Council

American Farm Bureau Federation

American Forest & Paper Association

American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers

American Malting Barley Association, Inc.

Association of Global Automakers, Inc.

The Chlorine Institute

Corn Refiners Association

The Fertilizer Institute

Freight Rail Customer Alliance

Glass Packaging Institute

Growth Energy

Institute of Makers of Explosives

Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc.

International Warehouse Logistics Association

Louisiana Chemical Association

Motorcycle Industry Council Inc.

National Association of Chemical Distributors

National Barley Growers Association

National Corn Growers Association

National Farmers Union

National Industrial Transportation League

Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association

Steel Manufacturers Association

The Sulphur Institute

Vinyl Building Council

The Vinyl Institute

cc: Surface Transportation Board