Dear Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

The Rail Customer Coalition (RCC) strongly supports swift House passage of S. 808, the Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization Act of 2015. The RCC is a large coalition of trade associations representing the manufacturing, energy, and agricultural industries that rely on railroads. The freight rail industry is critically important to US economic competitiveness, and adoption of the reasonable, commonsense, and non-controversial reforms in S. 808 will help ensure a more appropriate balance between the rail industry and their customers.

The RCC actively supported the bicameral and bipartisan effort to provide an extension of the Positive Train Control deadline, and we commend the House and Senate for adopting the extension in the last short-term highway bill. The RCC is also encouraged to see the productive rail safety and passenger rail provisions advancing in the long-term highway bill.

S. 808 passed the United States Senate by unanimous consent on June 18, 2015 and has been pending in the House for the last several months. Now is the time to finalize these carefully negotiated and important reforms in S. 808 and sign this bill into law.

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) has not been reauthorized since it was created in 1995, and this bill would represent the most comprehensive rail economic legislation since 1980. The bill would make important reforms to better equip the STB to handle today’s freight rail challenges, such as giving the STB investigatory authority, creating a voluntary arbitration system, and requiring the Board to maintain a simplified and more efficient rate review mechanism when a full “stand-alone cost” review is too burdensome. Furthermore, the bill calls on the rail industry to invest appropriate resources to maintain rail service levels to prevent the types of service breakdowns such as were experienced in 2013 and 2014.

The Association of American Railroads has recognized the legislation, “strikes the right balance of preserving the market-based structure for shippers and railroads.” Sen. Thune has noted that while the STB has made “good faith efforts” to reform some of their policies, “the current inefficiencies in the STB’s operations are symptomatic of the need for common-sense reforms.”

The National Research Council, a division of the National Academies of Sciences, also recently released a comprehensive report calling for fundamental reforms to modernize the nation’s freight rail policies. The report highlighted major problems with the STB’s ability to fulfill its mandate to maintain reasonable rates for shippers that lack effective competition. The report concludes that the STB’s rate review procedures have become so costly and burdensome that they are now “unusable by most shippers.”

The RCC strongly urges Congress to take advantage of the unprecedented agreement between rail shippers and the freight rail industry to enact S. 808 as soon as possible in order to provide the STB with the tools it needs to oversee today’s modern freight rail industry.
Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association

[Alliance of Automobile Manufactures]

Alliance for Rail Competition

American Chemistry Council

American Farm Bureau Federation

American Forest & Paper Association

American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufactures Association

American Malting Barley Association

American Public Power Association

Auto Care Association

Chemistry Council of New Jersey

Chemical Industry Council of Delaware

Chemical Industry Council of Illinois

Colorado Association of Wheat Growers

Corn Refiners Association

Edison Electric Institute

The Fertilizer Institute

Foundry Association of Michigan

Freight Rail Customer Alliance

Georgia Chemistry Council

Glass Packaging Institute

The Green Coffee Association

Grocery Manufacturers Association

Growth Energy
Idaho Barley Commission
Idaho Grain Producers Association
The Idaho Wheat Commission
The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc.
Institute of Makers of Explosives
International Liquid Terminals Association
International Warehouse Logistics Association
Manufacture Alabama
Massachusetts Chemistry and Technology Alliance
Michigan Chemistry Council
Mississippi Manufacturing Association
Montana Farmer’s Union
National Association of Chemical Distributors
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
The National Industrial Transportation League
National Farmers Union
National Onion Association
National Retail Federation
Nebraska Wheat Board
New York State Chemistry Council
Ohio Chemistry Technology Council
Oregon Wheat Growers League
Outdoor Power Equipment Association, Inc.
Plastics Pipe and Fittings Association
PVC Pipe Association
Pennsylvania Chemical Industry Council
Promotional Products Association International
Rail Customer Coalition
Renewable Fuels Association
Society of Chemical Manufacturers and Affiliates
South Carolina Manufacturing Alliance
SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association
Steel Manufacturers Association
[The Sulphur Institute]
Texas Chemistry Council
U.S. Fashion Industry Association
Vinyl Building Council
Vinyl Institute
Washington Grain Commission
West Virginia Manufacturers Association
Western Fuels Association