

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
Remarks to National Emergency Number Association
Annual NENA 9-1-1 Goes to Washington Seminar
Washington, D.C.
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Good morning, everyone. On behalf of President Obama and Secretary LaHood, it's a pleasure to join you.

Let me begin by commending all of you on the remarkable but difficult work you do every day. And I want you know that DOT is 100% committed to working with NENA as the nation's 9-1-1 system transitions into this era dominated by wireless and digital communications.

Let me acknowledge Ron Bonneau, NENA's FRA liaison. NENA has been a critical partner, both in advancing the Next Generation 9-1-1 Initiative and the Department's strategic plan for GIS development: *Transportation for the Nation*.

And that's why I was so excited to address you this morning: to thank you for our continued partnership and to talk about how we can make our partnership stronger – particularly as the role that rail must play grows substantially to meet our nation's transportation needs.

The Federal Railroad Administration is the chief safety regulator for all freight and passenger railroads nationwide. We were created by Congress in 1966 and we are one of ten operating agencies that make up the US Department of Transportation. Our mission is to enable the safe, efficient and reliable movement of people and goods for a strong America, now and in the future.

Railroading is a tough business, and at one time, it was considered one of America's most dangerous occupations. It is an unforgiving environment with heavy equipment – and the possibility for accidents is always present.

Thankfully, our industry has worked diligently to reduce the risk of harm and we have substantially decreased the number of accidents in the railroad environment.

I am proud to say that, by virtually every measure, 2012 was the safest year in railroad industry history. But our goal, always, is to do better: ensuring continuous improvements to railroad safety.

And while I'm indeed proud of the industry's safety record and of FRA's role in helping bring about positive changes, there is one notable exception: That's injuries and deaths due to trespassing on railroad rights-of-way – today's number one cause of railroad-related fatalities.

Rail trespassers are most often pedestrians who walk across or along railroad tracks as a shortcut. Some are engaged in recreational activities – from exercising to hunting to off-roading. Others are loitering or engaged in theft or vandalism.

Simply put, trespassing takes on many forms. But whatever form it takes, it is illegal, dangerous and too often results in fatalities.

Nearly every day in America someone dies due to rail trespassing – and virtually all of these deaths are preventable.

So I am here to ask the PSAP community – those who coordinate emergency management and response – to also join our efforts to stop these incidents from happening.

And this call to action comes at a critical time – just as our country recognizes the need to expand rail's role in moving people and freight.

The reality is clear: America cannot afford to sit on the sidelines – and not fully modernize our rail network.

World-leading economies do not develop by accident, nor do they evolve by resting on one's laurels. World-class economies rely on a world-class – and constantly-improving – transportation system.

And the key word here is "system." It's not good enough to build the best roads, or the best airports, or the best railroads.

A world-leading economy requires us to build a true system – one in which each transportation mode works in unison with the others to ensure the efficient movement of people and goods.

This is why the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the American Society of Civil Engineers – all of them agree: The future of American transportation is multimodal. And in order to build this multimodal system, rail must play a much larger role in moving people and goods than it does today.

As a nation, we face the challenge of moving 100 million additional people and 4 billion more tons of freight per year over the next three decades. And this is happening as our highways and airports are already stretched close to their limits – and the cost of our over-reliance on them continues to grow.

According to last month's Texas Transportation Institute Report, the annual cost of highway congestion alone now costs our economy over \$120 billion a year, a cost of \$800 annually to each commuter.

Our airports, as well, are struggling to keep up with demand, with around 20 percent of all flights delayed. And as a way of confronting high fuel prices and changing demand, airlines are now making significant cutbacks to short-haul flights to small and medium-sized cities.

In the face of these challenges, rail's efficiencies simply cannot be ignored. With service levels targeted to the market, rail can be the most cost-effective, least oil-reliant, and most environmentally friendly mode to move people and freight.

Two railroad tracks can carry as many travelers in an hour as 16 lanes of freeway – and do it more safely.

One double-stacked train can replace 300 trucks, saving nearly 80,000 gallons of fuel over the course of a cross-country haul.

We also can't ignore the fact that Americans' travel habits are evolving.

Since 1997, Amtrak's national ridership has grown 55% - faster than any other major travel modes, and at a rate that also outpaces both our population and GDP growth.

Furthermore, according to a recent study by the U.S. PIRG and Frontier Group, over the last eight years, while Americans have chosen passenger rail and public transit in record numbers, they have actually reduced the amount they drive.

These changes are happening fastest among young people. In an eight-year period starting in 2001, young people reduced their vehicle miles traveled by 23 percent and increased their average passenger miles traveled by rail and buses by a whopping 40 percent.

So this is the future we must prepare for.

Today, thanks to the President's achievable vision for American rail – and thanks to record-setting federal and private-sector investments in our rail network – we are now hard at work laying the foundation for a 21st Century rail system.

In addition to 2012 being the safest year in rail industry history, Amtrak achieved record on-time performance and set its 9th all-time ridership record in a decade – while intermodal freight traffic surged above 12 million units, very close to an industry record.

California is now set to begin construction on a world-class, 220 MPH, passenger rail service between Los Angeles and San Francisco this summer.

In the Midwest, 110 MPH service – the fastest trains outside the Northeast Corridor – was introduced on the Chicago-St. Louis and Chicago-Detroit routes.

In order to bring world-class service to one of the world's most densely populated rail markets – the Northeast Corridor – we launched the first comprehensive planning effort since the Carter Administration.

Of the 12 High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program construction projects completed last year, Maine's rail extension project alone generated millions of dollars in new commercial and residential development around the new Brunswick train station, and created and sustained jobs at 53 companies in 20 states.

But all of this is simply a warm-up.

The \$19 billion this Administration has invested in rail since 2009 is building, improving, or creating 6,000 corridor miles, 40 stations, 75 planning studies, and 30 state rail plans or service development plans.

And with our High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program – through which we've been able to partner with 32 states and invest in 152 rail projects – the next two years will be our busiest construction years yet.

Looking ahead, 44 construction projects in 14 states worth \$3.5 billion in funding are either complete, under construction, or set to begin.

But as exciting as last year's rail achievements were – we're focused now on doing better.

That starts with safety.

And the reality we face today is that trespassing incidents – in addition to train-vehicle collisions at highway-rail grade crossings – represent roughly 95% of all railroad-related fatalities.

It's a sobering statistic – one that should remind us of the need to stay focused on both our response efforts and our prevention efforts.

Our new rule on Emergency Notification Systems will improve both of these.

On the prevention side, it will require railroads to establish emergency notification systems at every highway-rail grade crossing so that the public can more easily report malfunctioning signals or any other unsafe conditions.

And on the response side, these systems will help accident witnesses or first responders quickly notify the railroad, whose dispatchers will be ready to alert the appropriate call center and relay vital information to locomotive engineers.

Another new rule on its way will require railroads to establish risk reduction programs, which will include a requirement that railroads effectively collaborate with emergency first-responders.

Now, both the FRA and NENA have made it a priority to streamline communications between railroads and call centers.

We have held emergency response training with railroad dispatchers. And with our safety partner, Operation Lifesaver, we're now looking into developing training courses for PSAPs.

Additionally, with NENA's help, we have produced a document detailing proper procedures for PSAPs to use when responding to railroad emergencies.

Looking ahead, it's clear that GIS data and mapping have tremendous potential to strengthen communication between railroads and PSAPs.

This is the future. And today, we're working very hard to fully develop our GIS system.

That includes updating data on a weekly basis and – in response to what we've heard from NENA – incorporating more and more railroad mile posts.

And in addition to sharing this data with PSAPs upon request, we have made the data available through multiple sources – including the National Transportation Atlas Database.

The challenge now is to use this data strategically to empower our ongoing efforts – to improve emergency response times, to save lives, and to enhance our prevention efforts.

We're now developing a web mapping application that allows users to input information and geo-locate grade crossings.

We're also very excited about a mobile app we're developing that will enable iPhone and iPad users to locate and study grade crossings; view the National Grade Crossing Inventory and Collision Records; and contact the FRA with questions or concerns.

Now, as these emerging technologies begin to optimize emergency response, I ask that you also remain committed to helping us solve the challenges posed by rail trespassing and highway-rail grade crossings.

We have already benefitted from NENA's support: A former NENA president partnered with us on our Trespass Prevention Research Study in Florida – and members of the PSAP community are already certified presenters for Operation Lifesaver's educational outreach efforts.

But my challenge to NENA is this: Expand your partnership with Operation Lifesaver, and through that partnership help expand our educational outreach.

I encourage even more PSAP community members to become certified presenters.

Remember, rail trespassers are most often pedestrians using railroad tracks as a shortcut.

And imagine if more communities heard from you – the PSAPs who take these calls in the aftermath of these clearly preventable accidents.

I also urge you to be in touch with our regional offices if you happen to become aware of any emerging trends or hot spots.

I know Ron can certainly help put you in touch. And you can find contacts for all our offices on our website as well.

Together, we can save lives.

As we improve safety, we must also fortify the rail industry for its growing role in our response to the challenges of a new century – congestion, fuel utilization, air quality, and global warming.

World-leading economies do not develop by accident, nor do they evolve by resting on one's laurels.

The next generation is counting on us.

And the time for action is now.

Thank you very much.