

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
Prepared Remarks
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Thank you, Flora, and let me thank APTA for its hard work voicing the American peoples' desire for more transportation choices.

As we chart our vision going forward, it really is all about the people.

Mayors, citizen groups, local chambers of commerce – they see the connection between rail access and more livable, healthier communities.

And while rail is already an extremely safe way to travel, our job is to ensure American passenger rail grows to meet rising demand safely, reliably, and efficiently.

So as we modernize railroad infrastructure, we must also modernize railroad safety culture – ensuring continuous improvements to the railroad safety advances of the past decade.

You just heard Deputy Secretary Porcari outline the great progress made these past four years building the passenger rail network our economy needs and that our people deserve.

And as rail development projects move forward across the country – improving speed, frequency and reliability – it's important to note that these projects are also, in many cases, steps forward for railroad safety.

I'll provide two examples.

In Illinois, a fundamental part of the state's efforts to raise speeds along most of the Chicago-St. Louis corridor to 110 MPH is the upgrading of 235 grade crossings.

And in North Carolina, projects enabling more roundtrips and faster speeds for passenger trains are also allowing for 50 crossings to close between Raleigh and Charlotte.

Since FRA's last safety reauthorization – the Rail Safety Improvement Act – total railroad accidents have dropped for five straight years, making 2012 the safest year in railroading history.

Additionally, over the past decade, total train accidents have declined 43 percent, with a 40 decrease in derailments and a 34 percent decrease in highway-rail incidents.

This has been achieved by good use of data, resulting in increased inspection audits, periodic spot inspections in strategic locations, and new partnerships with industry and labor.

But, we still have more work to do. And as recent accidents show us, we also must continue to be vigilant in carrying out our core safety oversight functions.

In the last two weeks, we have begun investigating four train accidents, two involving passenger trains.

And while our investigations always center on compliance with our safety regulations, we also look at each operator's safety culture – which speaks to our comprehensive safety approach.

We continue working with the industry to implement Positive Train Control.

We're also addressing human factors underlying accidents by aggressively pushing forward with Risk Reduction Programs like the Confidential Close Reporting System – and System Safety programs, which will apply to commuter, intercity, and emerging high-speed operations.

These programs present a significant opportunity to take proactive measures that will prevent accidents – and to use an honest yet non-punitive assessment of human factors to truly understand root causation.

The guidelines for System Safety our Railroad Safety Advisory Committee developed were based on a voluntary commuter railroad program administered by APTA for more than 15 years.

FRA is now working on a final rule to be published in late summer.

Our Risk Reduction Program division continues to work with several railroads – including Amtrak and New Jersey Transit – on Confidential Close Call Reporting System pilot projects.

To date, our most mature pilots have yielded remarkable results: a 70 percent reduction in accidents, and a 90 percent reduction in discipline.

Recognizing the program's success, the President's 2014 FRA budget request includes funding to expand it to a nationwide program.

Additionally, we are requesting additional funding for our Safety and Operations program to support activities such as railroad employee training.

With our two core authorizations set to expire at the end of this fiscal year, our 2014 budget request contains a comprehensive blueprint for moving forward.

Our proposal includes \$6.6 billion for rail safety and improvement programs – the first of a five-year, \$40 billion rail authorization that recognizes the fundamental link between passenger and freight service improvements and safety.

The centerpiece of our five-year vision is a \$6.4 billion request for a National High Performance Rail System program that would provide competitive grants to fund essential development projects.

And this not only includes building higher-performing passenger rail networks to meet future demand – it includes essential upgrades to our existing rail network: addressing project backlogs and allowing for the replacement of aging equipment.

The program would fund a portion of the Positive Train Control implementation costs for the Nation's 27 commuter railroads.

And to improve network reliability and safety, we would fund congestion mitigation projects to untangle major chokepoints.

To fund the National High Performance Rail System program, we are proposing the establishment of a new Rail Account within the Transportation Trust Fund.

For decades, Congress has funded highway, transit and aviation programs through multi-year authorizations that empower states, local governments, and the private sector to plan for and make investments.

It's time for rail to achieve parity with other transportation modes.

With the support of Congress – for the sake of our children and grandchildren – we can continue building a rail network that is more safe, more reliable, and more efficient.

And we can fully recapture the bold spirit of previous generations who – on our behalf – built the transcontinental railroad, the Interstate Highway System, and our aviation network.

The people are counting on us – and rail's renaissance is ours to shape.

So thank you for being a part of this new chapter in transportation history.