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Prepared Remarks
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(AASHTO)
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Good morning. On behalf of President Obama and Secretary Foxx, it is a pleasure to be here this morning with state transportation leaders.

First, let me recognize FRA's policy and development team, led by Associate Administrator Paul Nissenbaum and Director Corey Hill. And let me start by acknowledging everyone's hard work to implement key aspects of PRIIA – the work to implement 209 contracts; the good work of states, Amtrak, and other stakeholders in the NEC Commission to develop a new cost allocation methodology; and the great progress made by the Next Generation Equipment Committee.

But we're here in Columbus today just one week before our rail authorizations expire, and as rail continues to lack a predictable source of federal funding like other transportation modes. So today I really want to hone in on our vision. I'd like to talk about how far we've come these past four years to meet President Obama's goal to connect 80 percent of Americans to a high-performance rail network – and how far we still have to go.

Five years ago, our core rail authorizations were passed by members of Congress working together in true bi-partisan fashion. And their actions – as you know – built the policy framework for the President to make that initial \$8 billion investment that launched the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program.

The ball is back in our court. It is now up to all of us to successfully make the case for a rail re-authorization and the predictable federal funding we need to continue advancing the President's goal. At FRA, we see this goal as critical to our mission of ensuring the safe, reliable, and efficient movement of people and goods for a strong America, now and in the future.

Since our authorizations were passed, we've witnessed remarkable gains in all three areas.

Our commitment to ensuring continuous safety improvement has led us to the safest year in railroading history – with a 43 percent drop in accidents over the past 10 years. But we must always do better. As some of the high-profile, tragic train accidents this summer – both in the United States and abroad – show us: When it comes to safety, our job is never done.

So we must continue to take a comprehensive approach to identifying and reducing risk throughout our rail system.

This includes installing advanced safety technologies such as Positive Train Control. And it also includes proactively addressing human factors – the largest contributor to train accidents – through Risk Reduction, System Safety, and other programs that identify hazards and address them in advance.

Now, we've also made remarkable progress improving reliability and efficiency.

We have seen Amtrak's on-time performance – along with its ridership – reach record highs.

And the return on our rail investments will continue to include, in addition to safety improvements: more service; faster trip times; and, enhanced reliability, in five key regions driving the huge increase in demand for passenger rail.

This is a vast sea change from where we were four years ago.

We're now leading a comprehensive, multi-state planning effort in the Northeast Corridor – proactively looking at what we need to do to invest in world-class service – and meet *all* the rail transportation needs of the region. 110 MPH service has been introduced and is now expanding in the Midwest. And corridor development programs are up and running in the Pacific Northwest and Southeast.

Over the past four years, our investments have nearly doubled the amount of service that will be capable of operating at regional express speeds of 90 to 125 MPH. And compared to four years ago – more than 24 million Americans will soon have access to service being upgraded from traditional, feeder service to these higher-performing speeds.

But we're only getting started.

With 99 percent of our funding obligated, our High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program is now entering a sustainable four-year phase of construction. 40 projects worth \$3.6 billion in funding are either under construction, or will be soon in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-three projects of all types are complete – and five more are expected to be complete in the next six months.

In sum, the \$18 billion invested by the federal government in rail since 2009 is now at work:

- Improving 6,000 corridor miles
- Upgrading 40 stations;
- And procuring hundreds of new passenger cars and locomotives.

Freight railroads – meanwhile – are investing in capacity expansion like at no other time since the 19th century.

And while our comprehensive safety program ensures freight and passenger rail's safe expansion, both have been big winners of our now-four-year-old TIGER program.

Through TIGER, we have been able to provide unprecedented federal support to pursue public-private freight rail partnerships – speeding up the gains in safety and efficiency we'll see by moving more freight by rail.

And in this latest round of TIGER, roughly 30 percent of the total funding went to rail projects – bringing total rail funding awarded through the program up to \$808 million since 2009.

Success is made possible by you, the states: the very people who plan, build, and implement the majority of transportation projects.

We recognize this. And we have worked very deliberately through our new strategic plan to strengthen our partnership:

- To encourage strong state and regional planning;
- To help grow institutional capacity;
- And to provide technical assistance that will help projects proceed on time and on budget.

From the very beginning, we knew the President's goal would not be achieved overnight.

But it also is important to remember – despite the occasional noise in the media and on Capitol Hill – we are now executing a very clearly laid out, achievable plan to connect 80 percent of Americans to a high-performance rail network.

Now, when we talk about a high performance rail network, we're referring to much more than speeds. We're referring to the safety, efficiency, and reliability of a robust freight and passenger rail network – which we've integrated seamlessly into our vision for a five-year reauthorization.

The centerpiece of our reauthorization proposal is a National High Performance Rail System program focused on safety enhancements, freight and passenger rail improvements, and strong planning – a holistic approach that better reflects our complex, interconnected rail system. And let me add that we're working to better integrate our RRIF loan program into these goals – and I'm looking forward to hear the presentation later on how Ohio is helping short lines use our RRIF program to fund infrastructure improvements.

Through the National High-Performance Rail System program, we would continue developing the three tiers of passenger rail service – Core Express, Regional Express, and Feeder Systems – while seeking to achieve a state of good repair for Amtrak.

But we would also look to improve network reliability by funding projects that address major rail chokepoints. Freight rail projects with clear public benefits would be eligible.

It includes upgrades to critical intermodal freight corridors and connection points to help shift long-haul intercity trucks to rail.

It would provide upgrades to short lines, as we have in recent years through RRIF, TIGER, and – in the case of shared right of way – through our passenger rail investments.

It would also support projects that would both improve network reliability, enhance safety, and reduce the negative impact rail can have on communities: projects that would result in rail line re-location efforts or the sealing of corridors by strategically closing crossings while constructing overpasses and underpasses.

At the heart of our vision for a National High-Performance Rail System is a strong emphasis on state, regional and national planning activities that form the backbone of success.

Time and again, we have seen how the demand for our grant programs far outweighs our available funding.

With the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program, the applications that came in requested more than seven times the available funding.

With this latest round of TIGER, for the \$474 million in available funding, the applications that came in requested more than 20 times that.

Meanwhile, the pipeline of potential rail projects – thanks to your strong planning efforts – just continues to grow.

Today, service development plans and Tier I environmental analyses are complete or will be soon for the development or improvement of 9,000 miles of rail corridors in 33 states.

More than half of these corridor miles are planned for either top-tier regional or core express high-speed services.

And in fact, the projects in our pipeline today – if funded – would extend access to a high-performance passenger rail system to roughly 61 percent of the population, moving us substantially closer to the President's 80 percent vision.

Good projects that recognize our transportation needs, and how the efficiencies of rail can meet these needs, are one of the best arguments we have to increase investments in transportation.

This is what builds the case for dedicated federal rail funding.

And for all of you here today, this should underscore the need:

- to constantly refine project management and delivery,
- to overcome communication hurdles,
- and to be ever-vigilant about bringing in projects on time and on budget.

It is time for Congress to work together again and re-commit to making smart investments in rail.

Investing in any transportation improvements on a year to year basis is both difficult and inefficient.

You need – and you deserve – predictability, with rail achieving parity with other transportation modes. No successful rail system in the world has been developed without it.

More than half of century ago, the Highway Trust Fund was created to achieve President Eisenhower's goal of an Interstate Highway System.

It took 28 sessions of Congress and 10 Administrations to fully achieve his vision.

Your work is the best argument we have to make a similar commitment to rail – the next generation of transportation and the mode of opportunity.

So let's stayed focused, doing good work with the funds allocated to date.

Let's continue to do good planning – understanding transportation needs, market demands, and the roll that freight and passenger rail should play.

Let's strengthen the project pipeline with high-quality projects.

And let's continue making the case for a rail authorization that empowers all of you in this room – both government and the private sector – to build the high-performance rail system our economy needs, and that our people deserve.

Thank you very much.