

**Remarks for  
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Administrator  
Federal Railroad Administration**

**Before the  
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Maintenance-of-Way Association  
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- Thank you, and good morning. Secretary LaHood and I very much appreciate everyone's hard work and efforts throughout AREMA to make rail transportation the safest mode there is.
- We share with you the satisfaction that rail safety continues to improve, and that accidents and fatalities are at historic lows, but we still have growing concerns.
- But first, let me tell you something about where I come from:
- As you may know, I'm a fifth generation railroader who has spent my entire career in the railroad industry -- on the Illinois Central and METRA here in Chicago, and at the United Transportation Union. For me, safety is personal.
- I have seen firsthand the dreadful impact that crossing collisions and trespasser deaths have on families, communities and railroad employees. Plus, too many friends have been involved in Employee On Duty fatalities. That trauma is something we live with our entire lives.
- However, we have an opportunity going forward to create better safety systems.
- Through the Rail Safety Improvement Act and the Recovery Act, there has never been a better time to improve safety and carry out President Obama's vision for high-speed passenger rail networks in the US.
- I'll talk more about the Administration's historic investment in high speed rail and intercity passenger program's, but let me first address FRA's main order of business-- safety.
- Our mission and legacy here is twofold: increased safety, and developing a national network of high-speed and intercity passenger rail service.
- However, these two ambitions are not mutually exclusive. We can and will do both.

- Let me lay down the state of our safety perspective at the outset, as this will be the overriding theme in existing freight operations as well as future high-speed systems. Remember, FRA is a safety agency foremost above all other things, and I think this group understands where I'm coming from.
- As you think about our safety mission, I want you to also think about how it dovetails into high-speed rail, as you will be the ones building and maintaining our high-speed rail network.
- We will absolutely continue to ramp up our commitment to ensuring safe railroad practices to protect the safety of railroad workers and passengers.
- Reported accidents are down this year, but I wish I could say the same for employee fatalities, which remain far too high at 13 deaths.
- Plus, the unfortunate events that occurred in Chatsworth last year make painfully clear that railroad safety awareness and best practices demand improvement. The American people and railroad employees view these catastrophic events and simply ask—*why do things like this happen?*
- As public servants, we need to answer their questions regarding what is being done to prevent more accidents and deaths, and grow public confidence in our safety programs.
- At FRA, we strive to foster a safe working environment not only for employees, but the benefit of communities and passengers.
- We need management and labor to work together to create a workplace that is safe and without intimidation. We want to create a culture of safety that permeates freight and passenger railroads alike.

- All of us here are the rail safety guardians who share the responsibility to protect our people and communities with best safety practices through *education, technology, and leadership*.
- Of first importance is education: I commend AREMA for its vision and foresight in mentoring the young civil engineers as rail leaders of tomorrow. The next generation of leaders are in our schools right now and I'm sure sitting among us, listening, and developing their understanding of a safer, more efficient and productive rail industry.
- Workforce development is part of the National Rail Plan we're developing, and our future rail civil engineers are our best hope for practicing rail safety, who in turn teach the next wave of engineers, ensuring that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren have safe rail transportation.
- Through technology, we establish a long-term focus toward automated inspections in the digital revolution. We need to be imaginative in our attempts to understand the technologies that will make rail safer. We need to do these things now, because the future will not wait.
- In terms of leadership, DOT occupies a role in global transportation unsurpassed by any other nation. With more than 53,000 employees stationed in the United States and around the world, the Department is dedicated to improving transportation by making it safer, less congested, better connected, environmentally friendly, and fully operational in all conditions.
- FRA's leadership has always been intensely focused on railroad safety. Our safety mission really began to turn the corner with the *National Rail Safety Action Plan*, which was effective by helping to reduce the most common causes for rail-related deaths and injuries.

- The *Plan* targeted the most frequent and highest-risk causes of train accidents, and accelerated research into new technologies that can improve safety. These include track safety, hazmat safety and emergency response, highway-rail grade crossing safety, a strengthened enforcement and compliance program, and a Risk Reduction program to predict human errors that cause accidents.
- These results are a good start, but the real key to greater safety lies in the acceleration of our Risk Reduction Program, which calls on us to create innovative methods to address the underlying risk factors that result in train accidents and employee injuries.
- The Risk Reduction Program incorporates “upstream” predictive data management to better identify and correct factors that contribute to accidents. It is proactive – rather than reactive – because it focuses on prevention.
- The Rail Safety Improvement Act requires Class 1 and passenger railroads to implement risk reduction programs with three essential elements.
- They are an overall risk reduction strategy, fatigue management plans, and a technology deployment plan.
- We are already off to a good start with the Confidential Close Call Reporting System, which permits employees to voluntarily and anonymously report "close call" incidents that could have resulted in an accident, but did not.
- The airline and mining industries have had similar programs for years, and it's time railroad management and labor get on the same page to figure out the root causes of accidents and injuries in a neutral and anonymous forum.

- The cumulative knowledge gleaned from “close call” reporting is being studied to develop solutions that prevent their occurrence in the future. Any reports that require immediate action are being handled promptly.
- In addition to Close Call, FRA envisions a wide variety of projects that will come under the umbrella of our Risk Reduction Program.
- Some examples include peer-to-peer training programs, management development systems, and the Collision Hazard Analysis which are currently in place on some commuter railroads.
- In addition, use of the Track Quality Index for predictive maintenance or capital investment, and use of wayside equipment monitors and sensors, track geometry and gage restraint systems, and rail flaw and joint bar detectors are all part of the equation.
- Some of the technological advances currently being tested include a more refined high-speed photo inspection system that will take a high-resolution picture of the joint bars, using pattern-recognition software to automatically detect cracks that are difficult to see.
- A laser vision system is being tested that will scan the track and track bed for anomalies, and, a ground penetrating radar that shows promise to inspect track bed and soil conditions.
- Driven by FRA research, we will soon initiate ultrasound and laser testing of rails to detect internal flaws, fatigue, and minute cracks.
- FRA is investing heavily in these types of technologies. For example, we have funded the University of California at San Diego’s efforts to refine a new technology that uses laser ultrasonic probes to detect certain internal rail defects. Rail flaws are the highest cause of track-related derailments.

- We are also working with Amtrak on a compact, low cost Autonomous Track Geometry System. Currently being tested on the Auto Train, this system performs the same functions as traditional geometry cars, minus the crew, car, traffic delays, and other associated costs.
- It provides near real-time wireless uploading and downloading with GPS positioning to detect track exceptions. This system can yield ten times the usage of traditional geometry cars, covering more than 100,000 miles in just 4 months, with great reliability.
- FRA is also working on a proposed Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for new vehicle/track interaction safety criteria for the high-speed track classes 6 to 9, which allow operational speeds ranging from 80 to 200 mph. This success, however, still points to a number of areas that require further research in safety critical areas.
- In an effort to improve track safety, our Automated Track Inspection Program, or ATIP, now operates three geometry cars. Since 2005, FRA has surveyed more than 188,000 miles of main track and discovered over 42,000 exceptions for remediation. Combined with the rail industry and FRA regional inspections, the ATIP effort has contributed to a 37% decrease in the number of track geometry-caused derailments since 2005.
- The Rail Safety Improvement Act has many other components that affect you which I need to touch on:
- **PTC** – We have been a strong proponent of PTC and worked tirelessly with many different railroads on many different systems for years, and are very glad the railroads have now cooperated to develop interoperability standards.

- Currently, there are nine PTC projects in 16 States that are being tested on about 2,600 miles of track. FRA has been providing technical support to railroads working to develop PTC systems, and to help spur technological innovation.
- As all of you know, we have issued a proposed rule for PTC implementation, and we are holding to the 2010 deadline for railroads to submit their plans, regardless of the waivers that have been submitted.
- PTC is an expensive proposition, but it should not come at the expense of normal safety-related maintenance, infrastructure repair, and implementing new safety technologies. We cannot shortchange other measures that prevent accidents and lives at the expense of PTC. The good news, however, is that PTC is an eligible expense in the Recovery Act, which will certainly help railroads resist the temptation to shift funds from one safety activity to another.
- **New Safety Inspectors** – Between 2009 to 2013, FRA is authorized to hire 200 additional safety inspectors, most of whom will be assigned to one of eight regional locations nationwide.
- **Highway-Rail Crossing Safety** – After trespassers, highway-rail collisions account for the highest category for injuries and fatalities in the industry. We must reduce these numbers. The safety legislation contains a number of provisions to improve highway-rail grade crossings, including a toll-free telephone number, maintaining a safe line of sight, keeping crossings free of debris, and a program to ensure an accurate national grade crossing inventory.
- **Track** – We have established a task force to evaluate and address the required intervals of track inspections for each class of track, remedial action requirements and repair priorities.
- **Rail Integrity**—FRA's staff will investigate rail flaws and other rail research initiatives and, in conjunction with RSAC, are considering standards for rail flaw

detection equipment in order to make inspections more accurate and reliable.

Work also continues on the most common rail flaws, rail defect growth, rail fatigue, and other relevant track-or rail-related research and studies, including information gleaned from the NTSB or FRA accident investigations.

- **Concrete Crossties** – New legislation addressing concrete crossties for Class 2 to Class 5 track requires automated inspection technology to measure for rail seat deterioration limits, concrete crosstie pad wear limits, missing or broken rail fasteners, loss of appropriate toeload pressure, and improper fastener configurations.
- **ADA Requirements** – We'll be conducting a study for compliance requirements at existing intercity rail stations and methods to correct station platform gaps. The legislation also requires Amtrak to evaluate improvements to ensure the elimination of gaps in passenger platforms.
- **Bridge Safety Regulations** – The Safety Act requires owners of railroad bridges to implement programs for inspection, maintenance, and management of bridges, and requires railroads to maintain information for local governments on tunnels that carry certain hazmat materials.
- It was our pleasure to work with AREMA last year to help distribute the *Essential Elements of a Railroad Bridge Management Program*, which is the blueprint for bridge maintenance for all railroads.
- To follow up on this, FRA issued a Proposed Rulemaking detailing bridge regulations in close collaboration with AREMA members. In this, we now have a common vision and language for bridge management and set a unified and consistent course to sustain the safety of railroad bridges. Plus, the Safety Act gives FRA the regulatory authority to oversee bridge maintenance programs.

- In addition, the Safety Act includes numerous provisions that will keep railroad engineers busy for years to come. There are provisions to encourage development and use of new technology with switch position monitoring devices or indicators; radio remote control; hot box, high water, or earthquake detectors; remote control locomotive zone limiting devices; slide fences; locomotive cab safety; grade crossing video monitors; track integrity warning systems; dark territory technology, plus much more.
- And for employees, the Safety Act includes long overdue hours of service reforms, including those for maintenance-of-way workers, and important whistleblower protection.
- The Safety Act aside, I'm also want to bring you up to date on the National Rail Plan. Congress mandated we have a preliminary draft done by October 16, and we will.
- It's a plan that incorporates both freight and passenger rail. But what's more, it creates a vision for a multi-modal transportation system that connects rail into commuter hubs, airports, ports, trucking and intermodal facilities, and highways.
- In developing this preliminary plan, we have reached out to state DOT officials, industry groups, and transportation experts. Before the final document is produced, we hope to receive your input, too.
- Finally, as you all know well, we are working on the \$8 billion high-speed and intercity passenger railroad program under the Recovery Act, which also has already provided \$1.3 billion to Amtrak.
- This is a historic time for us in railroading. President Obama has taken a keen interest in creating a passenger rail system that will revolutionize the way we travel in America.

- Not since Abraham Lincoln has a President shown a desire to advance passenger rail.
- You all know what past Presidents have tried to do...or maybe I should say didn't do...with Amtrak and commuter rail. In President Obama, we have a leader with the foresight and vision to realize the true potential of passenger rail.
- As the President and Secretary LaHood told me many times, it's time to rebalance our entire transportation network
- It's time to give more Americans more transportation options. And in doing so, reducing highway and airport congestion, saving energy, helping revitalize urban areas and heavy industry.
- With your help, we're going to integrate passenger rail corridors of 100 to 600 miles with the rest of our transportation network -- and bring rail into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- These corridors will be built on a regional basis, so that one day, millions of Americans will have seamless access to airports and transit stations, creating livable cities and inspiring new development.
- Plus, we will continue to upgrade the reliability, frequency, and service on existing intercity routes.
- And our freight rail system – recognized as the best in the world – has a large part to play in this effort. Through it, we will achieve even greater interconnectivity, reducing fuel consumption, traffic congestion and air pollution as we move people and goods faster than ever before.
- We know the engineering community has the knowledge, expertise, and wherewithal to help us successfully realize this grand vision.

- Just look at our interstate highway system, which has long been the envy of the world. When President Eisenhower first proposed the interstate highway system no one knew the future routes or how much it would cost. No one even knew how to sell this to the public and landowners. But it did slowly develop and grow till 30 years later there was a highly evolved interstate highway system.
- The same holds true for high-speed rail.
- That's why the initial \$8 billion is just a down payment for a project that could take 30 years to complete. And for engineers, that good job security for you. We need you to design it, shape it, sell it, and make it a reality.
- You're bright engineers. You're mission is to solve complex problems, and I believe you can stand up to the challenges ahead.
- In conclusion, FRA stands ready to work with AREMA to develop the practices, technologies and systems to develop a culture of safety within your organization, and help us make our high-speed and intercity passenger rail network a success.
- I ask each of you today and the days to come, to discover your '*common task*' make something "*extraordinarily safe*" happen.
- Once again, FRA is setting the bar high. Therefore, we will need to continually develop new research programs, new technologies and methodologies to ensure our national rail transportation system safely endures and expands as we embark on a new beginning in rail.
- Thank you.