

**ORAL TESTIMONY OF
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FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATOR**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RAILROADS, PIPELINES, AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chairman Denham, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee and discuss reauthorization of rail policy.

Our budget request, released today, reflects our reauthorization priorities – and also reflects an emerging consensus that rail is the mode of opportunity.

By 2050, America’s transportation network will need to move 100 million additional people and 4 billion more tons of freight per year – and it will need to do it safely, reliably and efficiently.

Today, our airports and highways are stretched close to their limits, hampered by congestion that costs our economy more than \$120 billion a year. These challenges underscore the need to invest in more underutilized transportation alternatives such as rail, which can be the most cost-effective, least-oil reliant, most environmentally friendly – and safest – mode to move people and freight.

Congress recognized this need in 2008, when it passed – with broad bi-partisan support – two landmark pieces of legislation – the Rail Safety Improvement Act and the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act – that have provided the policy framework for our safety and development initiatives now helping to fuel the resurgence of American rail.

Since these two landmark acts were passed, railroad accidents have fallen to record lows – while Amtrak’s ridership and on-time performance have risen to record highs.

Intermodal freight traffic surged last year near record levels – and the freight rail industry continues to reinvest in capacity expansions like at no other time since the Gilded Age.

Passenger rail, too, is experiencing a renaissance.

Amtrak has set ridership records 9 out of the last 10 years. And since 1997, its ridership has grown 55% - faster than any other major travel mode, and at a rate three times faster than America’s population growth during this period.

And while all of this occurs, historic levels of public and private investment are laying a foundation for a higher-performing rail system that is safer, more modern, and more efficient.

But PRIIA and RSIA are now set to expire at the end of this fiscal year.

And much as we've accomplished, much more needs to be done to re-balance our nation's transportation network.

Our budget lays out a comprehensive blueprint for moving forward.

Its fundamental goal is to take a more coordinated approach to enhancing the Nation's rail system – a holistic, integrated strategy that addresses safety issues, passenger and freight service improvements, and planning.

Our new approach builds on the core principles of PRIIA and RSIA.

And it better reflects our on-the-ground experiences – and the complex reality of our rail system, which mainly runs on privately-owned track and carries a mix of passenger and freight trains.

Safety remains our top priority.

RSIA has enabled us to focus on risk reduction program regulations and some of the most challenging safety areas: from hazardous materials to track, highway-rail grade crossings, and rail trespassing. Fully implementing these regulations will drive rail accidents and incidents to new record lows.

But continued capital investments that upgrade or eliminate the need for public highway-rail grade crossings – advancing the creation of sealed corridors – is another huge win for safety.

We envision the domestic rail industry again being world-leading – an industry that exports intellectual capital and rail products all over the world.

We will continue managing our investments through a transparent process.

And with your support, we can safely position our rail network for its increasingly vital role.

Much of the rail infrastructure we rely on today was built by past generations of Americans who acted boldly on our behalf. Now, the time has come for our generation – for the sake of our children and grandchildren – to recapture that visionary spirit.

A sustained, long-termed funding strategy – similar to those in place for highways, transit, and aviation – will make that possible. And it's appropriate given the enormous pent-up demand for rail projects.

For the \$10 billion this Administration invested in high-speed and higher-performing intercity passenger rail, we received applications from 39 states, the District of Columbia, and Amtrak requesting funding for more than seven times that amount.

Our reauthorization priorities will enable us to continue answering this strong demand – and it will enable rail to continue moving America's economy forward.

Thank you.