

**Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo**  
**Prepared Remarks**  
**48<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee**  
**National Housing Center**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**June 14, 2013**

Good morning, everyone. It's great to join you at the first RSAC meeting of 2013.

The RSAC is a true cross section of the railroad industry. Members have diverse perspectives – unique to their organizations and experiences. But the RSAC brings us together in common purpose: to ensure continuous improvements to railroad safety.

The relevance of our continued collaboration, this need, is underscored by rail's growing role in moving people and freight.

The freight rail industry is re-investing in capacity expansion like at no other time since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as intermodal freight traffic last year surged near record levels. And on the passenger side, the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program is entering its busiest construction seasons yet, as Amtrak's ridership is growing faster than any other major travel mode.

Last month, a new study by the U.S. PIRG and Frontier Group declared *the end of the driving boom*, while another study by the Urban Land Institute highlighted the changing demographics behind the rising demand nationwide for more convenient passenger rail access. And looking ahead, the population growth and mobility challenges we face in just the next few decades – challenges that will require our transportation network to move an additional 4 billion tons of freight annually – simply cannot be ignored.

Rail is the mode of opportunity. So while rail is already a very safe mode, our job is to ensure American freight and passenger rail grows to meet this rising demand safely – as well as reliably and efficiently.

And as we modernize railroad infrastructure, it's just as important that we also modernize railroad safety culture. Since FRA's last safety authorization – the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 – we've seen total railroad accidents drop for five straight years, making 2012 the safest year in railroading history.

This has not happened by mistake. Rather, it's a testament to railroad workers' individual and collective commitment to safety, and to new and strengthened partnerships among industry, labor, and FRA. It reflects a concerted effort on the part of all industry stakeholders to achieve higher levels of safety.

At FRA, through systematic use of data, we've been able to increase inspection audits and periodic spot inspections in strategic locations. And as several train accidents last

month made clear, we must – always – remain vigilant in carrying out our core safety oversight functions.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act has allowed us to focus on some of the most challenging safety issues: from hazardous materials, to human factors, track, highway-rail grade crossing safety, and trespassing.

Together, we've taken steps to ensure the competency of locomotive engineers and conductors, raising even further the professionalism of the industry.

We have issued standards for passenger train employee hours of service, and requirements to establish emergency notification systems at every highway-rail grade crossing.

And later this morning, Dan Alpert and Brian Marquis will give a presentation on the Vehicle/Track Interaction Safety Standards final rule.

But we must keep going. Last year's safety record – that's now old news. To achieve new safety milestones year after year – to drive continuous safety improvement – we need to be even more focused and even more innovative.

As FRA works with the industry to implement Positive Train Control, we must continue our efforts to address the human factors underlying accidents.

Dan Arendt of the FAA is here today to give a presentation on safety management – and I'm very glad he's able to join us and look forward to seeing his presentation. Because what we'll learn from Dan connects to the evolution in railroad safety culture we're looking to lead, as we push forward with Risk Reduction Programs like the Confidential Close Call Reporting System – and with System Safety Programs that will apply to commuter, intercity, and emerging high-speed operations.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act mandates that both System Safety and Risk Reduction Programs incorporate Fatigue Management Plans, which the working group will update you on later this afternoon.

Coming from someone who has worked as a conductor and in the field, I know firsthand that this is an area where status quo will not do. Trains crews must have predictability as to when they will be reporting for duty so they can properly plan their rest.

System Safety and Risk Reduction Programs, at their core, are about identifying hazards and addressing them. And fatigue management – which our R&D team has been researching for more than a decade now – is one area where we know of the need to make meaningful improvements.

Thanks to the RSAC working group's recommendation, we have indeed made progress addressing electronic device distraction on the job by launching a collaborative educational outreach effort with industry and labor. And we look to amplify our

challenge to the industry and labor to form peer-to-peer groups that actively foster a stronger railroad safety culture in which the improper use of electronic devices is socially unacceptable.

As we lead an evolution in railroad safety culture, I challenge the RSAC to continue advancing a performance-based safety approach – just like we are doing today with the Engineering Task Force, which has worked hard to ensure proven high-speed train sets based on existing international platforms can be designed for and operated in the U.S.

Both risk reduction and performance-based safety approaches are integral to enabling American rail's renaissance to flourish safely, reliably, and efficiently.

Recognizing the success of the Confidential Close Call Reporting System pilot projects, the President's 2014 budget request includes funding to expand it to a nationwide program.

It also requests additional funding for our Safety and Operations program to support vital 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 recognizes the fundamental link between rail network development efforts and safety.

We think of our 2014 budget request – in total – as a comprehensive blueprint for moving American rail forward.

Our proposal includes \$6.6 billion for rail safety and rail improvement programs, and is the first of a five-year, \$40 billion rail authorization.

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 develop new passenger rail services and to substantially upgrade existing rail corridors.

It recognizes that our rail system is an intertwined network of freight, intercity passenger, and commuter operations – and that all must grow safely, efficiently, and reliably.

It would achieve a state of good repair for Amtrak: addressing project backlogs and provide for the replacement of aging equipment. And to improve overall network safety and reliability, it would fund congestion mitigation projects to untangle major chokepoints.

Freight rail projects with clear public benefits would also be eligible – projects similar to the Heartland Corridor, Crescent Corridor, the CREATE project in Chicago, Tower 55 in Ft. Worth, or Colton Crossing in California.

Upgrades for necessary improvements to short line railroads would be eligible, as would projects that mitigate rail's adverse impacts on communities – projects like rail line relocation or enhanced grade separations.

To fund these efforts, we propose to establish a new Rail Account within the Transportation Trust Fund.

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

It is time for rail to achieve parity with other transportation modes, so we can balance our transportation system and allow each mode to do what it does most efficiently.

Rail is the transportation mode of opportunity – and this rail renaissance is ours to shape.

So thank you for being a part of this new chapter in transportation – and for your commitment to ensuring continuous improvements to railroad safety.

Have a great meeting.