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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

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December 14, 2015

The Honorable Daniel R. Elliott III
Chairman
United States Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

The Honorable Debra Miller
United States Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

The Honorable Ann D. Begeman
Vice Chairman
United States Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

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Dear Chairman Elliott, Vice Chairman Begeman and Board Member Miller:

I appreciate the critical role that the Surface Transportation Board played in response to the deterioration of freight rail service that occurred throughout the mid-west and across the rest of the United States in late 2013 and through all of 2014. Your actions, especially the interim requirement that certain Class I railroads submit weekly data to the Board, were critical to the increased transparency that we have seen with respect to freight rail service. I frequently hear from constituents and stakeholders regarding the tremendous improvements in freight rail performance and the usefulness of these weekly metrics that have resulted from many of the Board's efforts.

The Board's interim reporting requirements that were later applied to all railroads played a vital role in helping the railroads, shippers, and a variety of stakeholders develop a better understanding of the scope, magnitude, and impact of bottlenecks in rail service across the Nation's freight rail network. I am pleased that the Board is considering the development of a more permanent policy that will enable the public to continue to monitor future rail performance. In assessing which performance metrics would be most useful, I hope that the Board includes the following:

- Total grain cars loaded and billed for all ordering systems by state, as a measure of both shuttle/dedicated train service and other than shuttle/dedicated train service;
- Running total number of outstanding car orders, including grain cars, and their average number of days late, by state;
- Performance for grain shuttle/dedicated grain train round trips, by region, versus planned performance;
- System velocity;
- System-average train speed by train type;

- Weekly average dwell time at key railroad terminals and key port terminals;
- Weekly average dwell time at origin for unit train shipments;
- Weekly total number of trains held short of destination or scheduled interchange longer than six hours by train type and cause; and
- The weekly total number of loaded cars in revenue service that have not moved for a determined period of time.

Freight railroads play an absolutely critical role in the performance of our Nation's economy, so I appreciate the attention and effort the Surface Transportation Board has given to the issue of freight rail service. While I recognize that increased demand across all commodities and a wide range of variables can strain the freight rail system, I urge the Board to favorably consider this request.

As was witnessed with the recent House passage of S. 808, the STB Reauthorization Act that will soon be sent to the President for his consideration, strong, effective oversight and transparency are among the best tools we have to ensure efficient and dependable rail service for a variety of sectors that are critical to our nation's overall economy.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
Chairman