



# Surface Transportation Board

## Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2026 - 2030

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## Overview

The Surface Transportation Board (STB or the Board) is pleased to present the Chairman’s Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2026 to 2030, which reflects the Board’s continued improvement in carrying out its mission and strengthening the national surface transportation system.

## Our Mission

The STB exercises its statutory authority and resolves disputes to advance an efficient, competitive, and reliable transportation system that supports the American economy. The Board protects the public interest, fosters economic growth, and ensures reasonable conduct across the transportation system while minimizing burdens and improving outcomes for the American people.

## Our Vision

To be an agile, objective, and effective regulatory body that serves the nation by driving innovation, resilience, and excellence in America’s transportation system. We envision a high-performing agency that promotes accountability, transparency, and collaboration and leverages technology, data, expertise, and streamlined processes to deliver timely and sound decisions and industry information for the public.

## Responsibilities

In carrying out its mission, the STB decides formal cases, resolves informal disputes, and conducts broader oversight. For formal proceedings—including complaints, investigations, emergency actions, and mergers and other licensing actions—the Board processes legal filings; conducts appropriate economic, environmental, and legal analysis; researches and prepares draft decisions; conducts a voting process; issues decisions; and defends agency actions that are challenged in court.

Outside of formal proceedings, the Board facilitates informal dispute resolution and works with governmental entities, the public, and the media to provide information about the agency and its processes. The Board also collects and analyzes service-related, economic, and financial data, producing studies and analytical tools that are useful to both the agency and the public at large. Board employees also handle important administrative functions, including information technology and security, facilities, finance, and human resources.

## History

The Board was established in 1996 as the successor to the Interstate Commerce Commission. The Board was administratively aligned with the Department of Transportation until enactment of the Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization Act of 2015 (STB Reauthorization Act), Pub. L. No. 114-110 on December 18, 2015.

## Statutory Authority

The STB is charged by statute with the economic oversight of the nation’s freight rail system. The Board has jurisdiction over, among other things, the reasonableness of railroad rates and practices; mergers; line acquisitions; new rail line construction; abandonments of existing rail lines; rail service issues including during emergencies and times of war or threatened war; certain matters regarding intercity passenger rail; and the national repository for recording loan agreements secured by rail equipment. Under the statute, the Board provides an efficient and effective forum for resolving disputes and other matters within its jurisdiction. The Board favors private-sector negotiations and resolutions whenever possible.

While most of the Board’s statutorily required duties involve railroads, the STB also has statutory functions concerning non-energy and non-water pipelines, household goods carriers’ tariffs, the intercity bus industry, and rate regulation of non-contiguous domestic water transportation (marine freight shipping involving the mainland United States, Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. territories and possessions such as Puerto Rico and Guam).

The statute also charges the Board with public-facing responsibilities, including direct services to the public (e.g., alternative dispute resolution or mediation) and regular reports to Congress.

## Organizational Structure

### Board Members

The Board is authorized to consist of five members nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Board’s vice chairmanship rotates among the members. If a member leaves the STB before the end of his or her term, a successor may be appointed to the vacant seat for the remainder of that term. Each member has a term of five years unless they are filling an unexpired term. The Board’s governing statute permits a member to serve up to one year after the expiration of that member’s term unless a successor is appointed.

### STB Offices

In addition to the Board members’ offices, the staff of the STB is organized into five offices. The five offices are comprised of attorneys, economists, and financial, transportation, and environmental analysts with expertise in the rail industry, as well as HR specialists, paralegals, IT specialists, and contractors providing support to ensure the STB has the capabilities to meet its statutory responsibilities.

### The Office of Chief Counsel (OCC)

OCC is the Board’s legal office. OCC provides legal advice and recommendations to the Board members for resolving the issues presented in cases before the agency, prepares draft decisions for the Board’s consideration, and defends the Board’s decisions when challenged in court. OCC also houses the legal functions and investigations management of the Board’s statutory Passenger Rail Program,

leading interoffice flex teams to carry out that work. In addition, OCC advises the Board on various mission-related legal matters, including government ethics requirements and matters involving the Freedom of Information, Paperwork Reduction, Government in the Sunshine, and Equal Employment Opportunity Acts, and other laws of government-wide applicability, and assists the Department of Justice in responding to ancillary litigation related to Board proceedings and the Solicitor General in transportation-related Supreme Court litigation. Finally, OCC performs administrative services for the Board, including receiving and processing formal filings, managing the agency's case and litigation dockets, administering the Board's voting process, clearing and releasing Board decisions, coordinating with the Federal Register for publication of decisions, tracking the Board's casework, and administering the agency's database for recording and perfecting secured transactions involving vessels and railroad rolling stock.

### The Office of Economics (OE)

**OE** provides economic, financial, industry, data, and engineering analyses for the Board. It provides technical advice and recommendations on pending matters, as appropriate. OE also makes available to the public a variety of statistical and financial data and analyses of the railroad industry. OE manages the Board-prescribed Uniform System of Accounts and cost accounting systems. OE also audits Class I carriers to ensure their compliance with these systems and uses the data provided by carriers to develop and disseminate the Uniform Railroad Costing System.

### The Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA)

**OEA** assists the Board in meeting its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other related Federal statutes. NEPA requires the Board to consider potential environmental impacts before making its final decision in certain cases. OEA conducts an environmental review of cases filed with the Board and prepares any necessary environmental documentation. OEA also conducts public outreach to inform the public about proposals before the Board and invites public comments on related environmental matters. It also provides technical advice and environmental recommendations to the Board on pending matters, as appropriate.

### The Office of the Managing Director (OMD)

**OMD** provides a wide range of administrative services in support of the Board's mission, including human resource management, financial services, IT support, cybersecurity, the Privacy Act, facilities management, and records management. It heads the Board's Privacy, Records, and Risk Management programs.

### The Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance (OPAGAC)

**OPAGAC** serves as the Board's principal point of contact for the U.S. Congress, Federal agencies, foreign, state and local governments, interested stakeholders, the public, and the media. This office is responsible for external operations including governmental affairs, communications, and compliance.

OPAGAC’s aids the public, disseminates accurate information concerning the agency and its work, and helps the public understand the law and the agency's decisions. It is also responsible for monitoring rail operations and service, maintaining tariffs, and mediation coordination. OPAGAC is also responsible for the management of Rail Customer and Public Assistance, which assists interested stakeholders and the public by answering questions pertaining to Board regulations and procedures and facilitating informal private-sector dispute resolution of rail operational and service-related issues and other matters.

**STB Office Organization Chart**

**Board Members**



## Strategic Goals

The Surface Transportation Board’s strategic goals are designed to promote a strong national economy, ensure a modern and efficient regulatory framework, leverage data and technology for transparent decision-making, and cultivate a high-performing workforce. Together, these goals position the agency to support an innovative, resilient, and excellent surface transportation system while promoting accountability, transparency, and collaboration

First, the Board seeks to foster the nation’s economic growth by supporting a robust transportation system driven by market forces. By enhancing competition, safeguarding service reliability, enforcing statutory obligations, and overseeing passenger rail protections, the agency promotes investment, supply chain fluidity, and national security.

Second, the Board aims to reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers and provide a nationally uniform, efficient market entry and exit process. Through modernized regulations, clear federal preemption policy, streamlined licensing procedures, and sound environmental and historic review processes, the agency promotes regulatory clarity while protecting the public interest.

Third, the Board will use data and technology to drive transparent, efficient, and informed decision-making. By deploying advanced analytics, improving case management systems, enhancing public access to high-quality data, and promoting alternative dispute resolution, the agency strengthens predictability, accountability, and stakeholder confidence in its processes.

Fourth, the Board is committed to fostering a workplace culture where excellent performance is recognized and rewarded. By aligning performance plans with organizational priorities, maintaining consistent communication between managers and employees, celebrating high achievement, and encouraging innovation, the agency ensures it remains mission-focused, adaptable, and results-driven.

Together, these strategic goals reflect a balanced approach to economic stewardship, regulatory modernization, technological advancement, and organizational excellence—ensuring the Board remains responsive to evolving industry dynamics and the needs of the nation.

## Strategic Goal 1

*Foster the nation’s economic growth by supporting a robust transportation system that is driven by market forces supporting investment in the nation’s supply chain and national security.*

Objective 1: Enhance competition and elevate the role of market forces in the surface transportation system.

Objective 2: Support the fluidity of the national supply chain and meet the security needs of the nation, including in times of emergency.

Objective 3: Ensure the processes for rates, practices, and other cases are expeditious and transparent.

Objective 4: Provide oversight of passenger rail service to carry out statutory directives.

### Objectives:

- Enhance competition and elevate the role of market forces in the surface transportation system.

#### *Strategy:*

- Remove anti-competitive barriers and enable meaningful competitive access remedies.
- Strengthen oversight of competition protections.
- Promote a climate that encourages carriers to invest in present and future capacity needs.
- Engage and communicate with stakeholders regarding private sector solutions to current and emerging opportunities and challenges.

- Support the fluidity of the national supply chain and meet the security needs of the nation, including in times of emergency.

#### *Strategy:*

- Monitor the service and operations of carriers and investigate changes in service metrics and/or reports from stakeholders.
- Enforce the common carrier obligation through the formal resolution of service complaints.
- Address service-related problems, including emergencies and national security needs, through informal dispute resolution of service complaints and timely issuance of decisions.
- Issue service letters and conduct oversight to ensure

accountability and service reliability.

- Ensure the processes for rates, practices, and other cases are expeditious and transparent.

*Strategy:*

- Adopt and maintain sound policies and methodologies for efficient and effective resolution of rate and practice disputes.
- Promote alternative dispute resolution processes as appropriate.
- Provide oversight of passenger rail service to carry out statutory directives.

*Strategy:*

- Monitor the on-time performance and delays of Amtrak’s trains in providing intercity passenger service over the nation’s rail network.
- Enforce passenger rail rights and requirements through efficient resolution of disputes, complaints, and, when appropriate, Board-initiated investigations.

## Strategic Goal 2

*Reduce regulatory barriers, eliminate undue burdensome patchwork regulations, and provide a nationally uniform, efficient market entry and exit process.*

Objective 1: Preempt undue burdensome and patchwork regulations.

Objective 2: Modernize and streamline STB regulations.

Objective 3: Evaluate railroad licensing actions for consistency with the public interest and provide exemptions from regulation, as appropriate.

Objective 4: Ensure environmental and historic reviews are expeditious, cost-effective, and sound.

### Objectives:

- Preempt undue burdensome and patchwork regulations.

*Strategy:*

- Issue declaratory orders and guidance on the scope and application of federal preemption.
- Modernize and streamline STB regulations.

*Strategy:*

- Evaluate regulations and policies and implement procedural changes to adjust to changes in the industry and increase the speed of decision-making.
- Evaluate railroad licensing actions for consistency with the public interest and provide exemptions from regulation, as appropriate.

*Strategy:*

- Elevate the role of markets in the evaluation of entry licensing requests.
- Reduce paperwork burdens and streamline processes for exit licensing requests.
- Consider the burden of regulations on short line and regional railroads.
- Ensure environmental and historic reviews are expeditious, cost-effective, and sound.

*Strategy:*

- Conduct timely and thorough environmental and historic preservation reviews consistent with NEPA, NHPA, and other laws, regulations, and court precedent.
- Consult with other Federal agencies, state and local agencies, tribes, and other interested parties.
- Provide the opportunity for public participation in the environmental and historic review processes, when appropriate.

## Strategic Goal 3

*Use data and technology to drive transparent, efficient, and informed decision-making and the availability of high-quality, accurate, and useful public data.*

Objective 1: Build an objective and nimble regulatory environment powered by advanced data analytics and technology.

Objective 2: Produce timely, predictable, and defensible decisions.

Objective 3: Provide well-defined formal and informal dispute resolution processes to enable parties to make informed decisions about how to best resolve their disputes.

Objective 4: Promote user visibility and reduce unnecessary burden in the agency's legal processes and data collections.

### Objectives

- Build an objective and nimble regulatory environment powered by advanced data analytics and technology.

#### *Strategy:*

- Deploy improved software and systems, including automation, for data analysis and visualization.
- Create internal and public dashboards.
- Build of culture of responsibly leveraging AI to increase efficiency.

- Produce timely, predictable, and defensible decisions.

#### *Strategy:*

- Adhere to internal and external deadlines.
- Improve the case management system, including tracking, to increase accountability and timeliness.
- Hold conferences, hearings, and oral arguments and provide adequate guidance to the parties as to the methods the Board intends to use to adjudicate disputes.

- Provide well-defined formal and informal dispute resolution processes to enable parties to make informed decisions about how to best resolve their disputes.

#### *Strategy:*

- Offer alternative dispute resolution services that facilitate private sector solutions to problems.
- Establish clear precedent for recurring or controversial issues to enable parties to understand the Board’s approach to similar cases.
- Provide a robust and accessible website with transparent information regarding both the Board’s formal and informal processes.
- Promote user visibility and reduce unnecessary burden in the agency’s legal processes and data collections.

*Strategy:*

- Collect and publish data permitting the public to better understand trends in traffic volumes, rates, and the financial health of the rail industry.
- Establish thorough data catalogs.
- Disclose key metrics to the public regarding internal case status so that stakeholders can be informed about the expected timing for specific Board decisions.

## Strategic Goal 4

*Foster a workplace culture where excellent performance is celebrated and rewarded.*

Objective 1: Revise and maintain performance plans that focus on merit and that are consistent, clear, and specific. Plans set forth clear individual expectations and goals and align individual employee efforts with organizational goals and priorities.

Objective 2: Maintain regular performance check-ins between managers and employees.

Objective 3: Recognize, support, and celebrate the highest performers.

Objective 4: Encourage innovative leadership at all levels of the agency by creating a culture that rewards new efficiencies.

Objectives:

- Revise and maintain performance plans that focus on merit and that are consistent, clear, and specific. Plans set forth clear individual expectations and goals and align individual employee efforts with organizational goals and priorities.

*Strategy:*

- Implement new performance plans for all staff.

- Maintain regular performance check-ins between managers and employees.

*Strategy:*

- Require a minimum of quarterly check-ins between managers and employees.

- Recognize, support, and celebrate the highest performers.

*Strategy:*

- Use performance bonuses to recognize high performers.
- Celebrate high performance through public recognition.

- Encourage innovative leadership at all levels of the agency by creating a culture that rewards new efficiencies.

*Strategy:*

- Use data analytics tools to demonstrate efficiencies gained.
- Use Special Act awards to acknowledge innovative leadership.

# Appendix:

## Summary of STB Goals and Objectives

