

***Opening Remarks of
Vice Chairman Gus A. Owen
Surface Transportation Board
Before***

***The National Grain Car-Council
Winter Meeting
Chicago O'Hare Hyatt Regency Hotel
February 5, 1998***

"It's Time to Re-Invent the Grain Car Council"

I appreciate being here today, and being given this opportunity to present, for the record, opening remarks for this meeting. In that regard, I view my task here today as being two-fold. First, I believe that if I am to accomplish anything here today, it is to set the tone for this meeting. Second, and overall, it is time to re-invigorate or re-ignite everyone's passion for what the Council's true mission is.

This Council has met six times since its inception in 1994. This meeting of course will mark its seventh gathering. Looking back, however, I am hard pressed to find just what it is that the Council has accomplished in recent years. The Council's genesis is rooted in the belief that if there is a forum, outside the regulatory process, within which railroads and grain shippers could convene and resolve ongoing problems with grain car availability and use.

There continues to exist today tension between providers and

users of grain cars. The Council for its part has met on numerous times to talk about the problems plaguing grain car supply. We need resolutions, and precise policy statements of the Council, depicting the manner and scope within which today's grain car shortage problems are to be solved.

The Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act, now requires the Grain Car Council to coordinate its activities with the Rail Shipper Advisory Council (Rail-Shipper Council). And the views of the Grain Council are to be included in the Rail-Shipper Council's report to Congress. To that end, I would say that the Rail-Shipper Council, the STB, as well as the public at large, are all depending on the experts in this room, who are among the world's most sophisticated transportation specialists, to come up with less intrusive government procedures for resolving car shortages impacting the grain industry.

But it has not happened. Who in this room can truly say that these meetings to date have accomplished the intended purpose mandated by the Council's Charter, or for that matter, mandated by the United States Congress.

This Council has the unique opportunity to reach genuine private based solutions to some of this country's most pressing grain transportation problems. And from this day forward, you should expect no less of your selves, than to use these meetings to reach cognizable and definitive solutions to some of the Nation's grain car problems.

You know, I do consider myself an avid reader of history. I recall reading that 110 years ago, the first public meeting of the Interstate Commerce Commission was convened to discuss, guess

what, grain car shortages. Well here we are, some 110 ten years later, and we still have not addressed, nor have we resolved some of the most basic issues impacting grain car supply. Why must it always take the prodding of a U.S. Senator or Congressmen, or for that matter, the prodding of the STB, before solutions to transportation problems are forged between providers and users of grain cars.

I am pleased about how focused this meeting's agenda is. It was worked out by my staff and certain members of this Council. But lets not view the agenda as another opportunity just to talk about the problem of car shortages. Lets use this opportunity to do something concrete and definitive about it.

Again, I thank you all for granting me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.