

**Remarks of Federal Railroad Administration  
Acting Administrator/Deputy Administrator Heath Hall  
Before the American Public Transportation Association  
High-Speed Rail Policy Forum  
November 29, 2017  
Washington, D.C.**

- Good afternoon and thank you Al Engel, for that kind introduction.
- I'm grateful to APTA for inviting me to speak you today, and relish this opportunity to meet with rail stakeholders.
- I'm very pleased to join APTA Acting President & CEO Richard White, newly named President & CEO Paul Skoutelas, Executive Board Chair Nathaniel Ford, members of the board, and other distinguished participants. We commend your dedication to preserve, expand and enhance commuter, intercity and high-speed passenger rail.
- On behalf of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, I want to acknowledge the important work of APTA as "the voice of public transportation," and its members and diverse affiliates.
- The theme of this event is: *Getting to a Tipping Point for High-Performance Intercity Passenger Rail.*
- And the timing of this gathering is great, since tomorrow we are holding our 2017 Rail Program Delivery Meeting.
- That annual event helps grantees successfully plan and deliver projects, mitigate risks, and improve FRA's stewardship of taxpayer dollars.
- Clearly there is some overlap between these two forums. Both are intended to advance a shared long-term vision for rail investment and network development.
- And both provide a venue for sharing knowledge, acquiring technical expertise, and discussing best practices.
- Without question, there are many promising opportunities for collaboration to be realized.

**Importance of Rail Transportation**

- I'm so honored to have been appointed as Deputy Administrator by Secretary Chao, and I truly believe in the importance of rail to America and our economy.
- When I was a kid growing up in Southwest Mississippi, my friends and I would watch the trains daily as they ran on the track and delivered goods to our manufacturing plants.

- Trains meant jobs where I grew up. It was our lifeblood.
- However, one day the trains stopped coming. Manufacturing plants closed and thousands of people were without jobs.
- My small town, which had more millionaires per capita than anywhere in the country, became one of the poorest counties in America.
- That town, like many other rural towns across this great country, is still working on rebounding.
- Obviously, both freight AND passenger rail are an important part of that restoration.
- You may not know this, but this isn't my first time with FRA. A little more than two decades ago, I walked through the doors of FRA as a young intern, eager to change the world.
- What I learned during that summer internship hasn't changed more than 20 years later – FRA is committed to safety, innovation, and good sound policy.
- The Department of Transportation is committed to those principles and facilitating the investment needed to grow rail. Secretary Chao has been very clear about that since she was sworn in.

### **Improving Effectiveness and Efficiency**

- While the Trump Administration's Infrastructure Plan is still under development, we've been implementing some important new regulatory and policy changes to help deliver infrastructure projects faster, and in a more responsible cost-effective manner.
- Secretary Chao appointed a Task Force within the Department to identify and implement needed changes in the permitting and approval process.
- DOT has issued new guidance on categorical exclusions for multi-modal projects. We expect this change to expedite the environmental review process so infrastructure projects can be delivered more quickly and effectively.
- With respect to reforming the regulatory process, President Donald Trump signed several highly significant Executive Orders. They include:
  - EO 13771 (1/30/17) on **Reducing Regulation and Controlling Regulatory Costs** requires agencies to identify and issue two deregulatory actions for each significant regulatory action issued, and deregulatory actions must offset costs.
  - EO 13777 (2/24/17) on **Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda** requires each agency to designate a Regulatory Reform Officer (RRO) and a regulatory reform task

force (RRTF) to review existing regulations that could be eliminated. U.S. DOT Deputy Secretary Jeff Rosen is our designated RRO and leading those efforts.

- EO 13783 (3/28/17) on **Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth** requires a review of all agency actions to determine if they burden the safe and efficient development of domestic energy resources.
- EO 13788 (4/17/17) titled **Buy American and Hire American** requires each agency to assess compliance with Buy America laws; assess use of waivers; and develop policies to maximize use of materials produced in the U.S.
- In sum, we are seeking to improve efficiency and advance innovative approaches to fund and deliver transportation improvements.

## **Innovation**

- Encouraging and embracing innovation is central to what the Trump Administration is seeking to accomplish.
- As we move forward toward a plan for revitalizing our infrastructure, it's important to emphasize there is no *one-size-fits-all* revenue model for projects.
- Consider this. Back in June, the Department unveiled our Infrastructure for Rebuilding America or INFRA grants program, that will make \$1.5 billion in discretionary funds available.
- In contrast to the FAST LANE grants, INFRA will use updated evaluation criteria and encourage leveraging of more non-federal funding—AND it will set aside *at least one-quarter* of its funding for rural projects.
- A key feature of this program is allowing the private sector to participate in financing public infrastructure.
- While public-private partnerships are not the solution for every infrastructure challenge, they can be an important tool.
- I should mention the latest TIGER grant program solicitation, announced on September 7, 2017, will result in \$500 million being awarded on a competitive basis, to projects that have significant impact on the nation, a metropolitan area or region.
- Among other project selection criteria, special consideration will be given to projects that improve access to transportation in rural communities, and facilitate economic growth and competitiveness.

- Also, in the near future, FRA plans on issuing several notices of funding opportunity for competitive grant programs focused on rail improvements. Under the FAST ACT, these discretionary grants include 4 types:
  - Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair
  - Restoration and Enhancement
  - Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI); and
  - Special transportation circumstances (under the CRISI authorization)

### **Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety**

- As most of you know, safety continues to be the DOT's— and FRA's-- highest priority.
- There is nothing more important than keeping our industry safe, and safety should always be first and foremost in our minds.
- So, I want to briefly talk about grade crossings. Did you know that roughly 96% of rail-related deaths in the U.S. are due to train-vehicle collisions and illegal trespassing?
- Highway-rail crossings are an issue that highlight the importance of safety, innovation, and investment.
- The data speaks for itself -- at least two people will be killed by a train today at a crossing or while trespassing. It will occur again tomorrow and the next day if we do not place greater emphasis on grade crossing safety.
- Thankfully, where high-speed passenger rail is concerned, grade crossings are generally eliminated entirely as a pre-condition of operating fast trains.
- Nevertheless, I make this plea because the issue affected me personally in May of last year.
- My former crisis public relations firm was called out to a grade crossing accident where a father and his two young kids were killed.
- It was an emotional moment for me, law enforcement, and first responders who were there on the scene. Because the driver wasn't paying attention, a woman is without her husband, her son, and her daughter.
- This is when my professional interest changed into a passion – a crusade if you will.
- We know who these victims are- and this is an important tool in our tool box at this time of year.

1. 75% of the victims are male.
  2. 59% of the drivers are between the ages of 20-49.
  3. And, collisions fluctuate by season, with the highest accident rates occurring in December, January and February.
- Many factors have kept the number of collisions stagnant: whether it's because people are in hurry, they are driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or handheld devices are distracting them from their surroundings, it is a serious problem.
  - The point is, we know these people. They are our neighbors. Perhaps their children go to school with ours. But I'm not telling you something you don't already know.
  - We, as Americans have been challenged before:
    1. In the 1980s, we were challenged to "just say no" as it related to drugs.
    2. In the 1990s, we were challenged to bring attention to drunk driving; and an organization that started with one mother whose son lost his life to a drunk driver brought about huge increases in public awareness.
  - Let's challenge ourselves once more to make the next decade the safest in rail history. I now we can do it.

## **Closing**

- In closing, I want to reiterate how much we value our work with APTA, its members, and allied stakeholders.
- DOT and FRA are committed to rebuilding our critical infrastructure, and the Trump Administration will be rolling out a robust investment proposal demonstrating its support.
- As someone who believes that good governance doesn't emanate from Washington, DC, but from localities and states, I look forward to learning from you what works and what doesn't.
- Thank you for your time and attention.

###