

**ORAL STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC ASSETS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HEARING ON  
"LAGGING BEHIND: THE STATE OF HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN THE U.S."  
July 14, 2016**

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Duckworth, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the current state of high-speed and intercity passenger rail in the United States.

Nearly eight years ago, Congress rightfully recognized that for our country to have a strong and modern transportation system, we must begin to move beyond our dependence on motor vehicles and aviation – we must have more reliable, frequent and faster passenger rail service.

To achieve this goal, Congress passed two landmark pieces of legislation. The first was the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, signed by President George W. Bush. PRIIA established the foundation, and the programs, for FRA's High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Program.

The second piece of legislation was the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which provided the seed money to begin building this stronger passenger rail system – while also jump-starting the country's economic recovery from the Great Recession.

In 2009, FRA began working to achieve a long-term, 25-year goal to connect 80 percent of the country's population to reliable, frequent and faster passenger rail service. The program had two parts:

1. To improve existing rail lines in order to increase capacity, speed and frequency of current passenger rail service; and
2. To develop new corridors to serve new markets with world class rail service – the likes of which already exist in many other countries.

The program was national in scope, but state-based in execution, similar to how the federal government built the Interstate Highway System more than a half-century ago. States were very much in the lead on requesting service, and planning projects. They were given the ability to seek funding for projects that best reflected the needs and characteristics of their individual markets.

FRA eventually received nearly 500 applications requesting more than \$75 billion worth of projects – far exceeding the \$10.1 billion available. These applications proposed a wide variety of service improvements, including increased reliability, frequency of service and speed.

After careful and thorough review of the applications, FRA awarded funding to support nearly 150 projects in 35 states and the District of Columbia.

Nearly 85 percent of these investments are concentrated in six key corridors, and those corridors serve 65 percent of the country's population.

Today, thousands of corridor miles of track are being constructed or upgraded, new passenger locomotives are being manufactured and more than 30 passenger stations are being upgraded. Rider experience is improving, due to increased reliability, new capacity, reductions in travel times.

Mr. Chairman, I know you have great interest in the Northeast Corridor. Let me assure you and this subcommittee: FRA is committed to this vital corridor. From the Recovery Act alone, FRA awarded nearly \$1 billion for improvements.

Of course, that does not include the more than \$3 billion that was initially awarded to the state of New Jersey to construct a new tunnel under the Hudson River – as you know that project, which would have addressed a critical infrastructure need at a critical time, was ultimately rejected. The U.S. Department of Transportation and Amtrak, as well as the states of New York and New Jersey, are now working to address this infrastructure threat again – with the lost years having cost us millions, if not billions.

**More than half of the 150 projects the administration funded are complete.** Another quarter are scheduled to be complete by the end of 2016.

Like all major and ambitious transportation projects, whether public or private and no matter the mode, there have been, and remain, important challenges that demand continued attention and conscientious oversight.

With a frequency at which few other federal grant programs have been reviewed, the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General have *exhaustively* audited FRA's implementation of the Recovery Act and appropriations for passenger rail grants 14 times. The program is arguably now the most deeply investigated and audited program in the Department's history. **In no case did the auditors identify waste, fraud, or abuse in any of the grants.**

Mr. Chairman, improving the speed, efficiency, and reliability of America's railroads is critical to moving our transportation system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, our most important task is ensuring

America's railroads are safe, which is why many of the investments we made as part of our program have also focused on safety.

We have invested in eliminating grade crossings, because the safest crossing is one where trains and motor vehicles will never cross paths. We have invested in bridge upgrades and repairs, track improvements, and Positive Train Control.

These investments are critically important because any increase we make to safety in one area of our rail system typically benefits the entire network because, in the United States, our freight and passenger rail networks are largely one-in-the-same – they frequently share track with each other.

Mr. Chairman, while I am on the issue of safety, I know that you are particularly interested in addressing our grant programs today, but I cannot address this subcommittee today without addressing safety as an overall issue.

On Friday, June 3rd, Union Pacific derailed a crude train in Mosier, Oregon. Fortunately no one was injured, but the resulting fire burning for more than 14 hours. FRA has recently announced that the cause of the incident was UP's failure to maintain their track in the area.

On Tuesday, June 28th, two BNSF trains collided in Panhandle, Texas, killing three crew members and injuring one. The injured crew member's life was saved when he leapt off a moving locomotive just prior to the head-on collision.

And just earlier this week, two passenger trains in Italy collided, killing more than 20 people and injuring more than 50.

Mr. Chairman, the FRA continues to do all that we can to improve safety – but we cannot do this alone.

Railroads and shippers must move to safer, stronger hazmat tank cars as soon as possible.

Railroads must implement Positive Train Control as soon as possible, and not wait until the 2020 deadline the Congress has most recently given them.

Railroads must upgrade their Civil-War era braking systems, so braking is more efficient, and in the event of a derailment, fewer cars leave the tracks, leading to a decreased risk of fire and injury.

And this Congress must do more as well – with increased funding for commuter railroads struggling to afford PTC, and additional funding for more safety inspectors

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and all members of the subcommittee, thank you again for inviting me here today. While we have wisely invested \$10 billion in high performance rail, this country continues to fall behind in making the needed investments in our passenger rail system. In 2015 alone, China invested \$126 billion on high-speed rail projects<sup>1</sup>.

There remains demand from communities and leaders across the country, and the Administration has made repeated budget requests for additional funding to meet these needs.

Our country's 21st century economy simply cannot thrive on a 20th century transportation system.

We need a strong transportation system, and the investments Congress made eight years ago to begin upgrading our passenger rail system to be

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/04/content\\_22926538.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/04/content_22926538.htm).

more reliable, frequent, and faster is only the beginning and must continue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the committee's questions.