

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 29, 2021

Amit Bose
Deputy Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Deputy Administrator Bose:

A critical step in the utilization of new technologies is the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) waivers and testing programs, which provide the freight rail industry the opportunity to achieve the next level of track, equipment, and employee safety improvements.

An example of the safety benefits of the waivers and testing programs is the automated track inspection (ATI) test programs/waivers. ATI inspections are conducted using track geometry technology installed in freight cars or on locomotives that test each foot of track.

These automated systems are changing the nature of track inspection. An automated approach involves gathering massive amounts of data and analyzing it for patterns and warning signs, empowering a shift from reactive to preventative track maintenance practices. These automated test systems improve the nature of railroad track inspections and can increase track safety.

An important component of at least one of the recent ATI pilot testing and waiver approvals allowed for an increase in the frequency of automated track inspections in place of visual inspections. This approach proved key to facilitating a better understanding of the optimal balance between ATI and visual inspections. This tremendous amount of data collected shows that the data-driven fusion of ATI and visual inspections is producing a superior safety outcome, with track employees' hours being reallocated to verifying and remedying the greater number of defects detected by ATI rather than conducting redundant visual inspections.

The results of the ATI programs have overwhelmingly proven the safety benefits of the concept. In some cases, the ATI tests have resulted in an over 90 percent reduction in unprotected main track defects per 100 miles tested.

Even with a proven track record of success, FRA has allowed several of these ATI programs to expire in recent months despite requests to continue and expand them. In one case, FRA declined to extend one railroad's program because it found that continuing the test would not yield new, significant data. If this delay is due to FRA's satisfaction with the ATI data collected to date, please indicate what next steps FRA is considering to further enable use of this safety technology, such as going through the rulemaking process to update the half-century-old track inspection regulations. If FRA seeks additional supporting data, please indicate when the Safety

Board will return to its long practice of timely reviewing waiver and test program requests to allow the nation's rail industry to advance.

Significant safety improvement opportunities are present now, and urge you to embrace these opportunities to improve safety through the FRA's appropriate and timely handling of waiver and test program submissions. We look forward to your response and to working with you further on this and other issues to improve railroad safety.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Roger Wicker
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator




Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



Roger Marshall
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Senator Blunt
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Michael S. Lee
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Bill Hagerty
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Shelly Moore Capito
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Deb Fischer
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Kevin Cramer
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James M. Inhofe
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