

February 8, 2018

*The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590*

Dear Secretary Chao:

We write to express our concern regarding the progress of Positive Train Control (PTC) implementation on freight and passenger railroads, in light of recent fatal rail accidents that may have been prevented had PTC been in effect. With the PTC deadline approaching at the end of this year, it is imperative for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to use resources provided by Congress to hire the necessary staff and contractors to provide guidance and certification of PTC implementation and for the Department to make available grant funding for railroads to accomplish this technologically challenging safety upgrade.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017 provided \$218 million for FRA Safety and Operations, \$5 million more than the requested level, specifically to fund the necessary staff for safety and PTC implementation. A PTC Deputy Staff Director and positions for other technical specialists within the PTC organization remain vacant. In addition, regional and headquarters safety staff remain below targeted hiring numbers. These vacancies persist even though the FRA has more than \$10 million available to fill them. The PTC deadline was extended by Congress more than two years ago, giving FRA ample time to hire the staff necessary to oversee the development and deployment of PTC nationwide. The Administration's hiring freeze last year certainly did not help the situation. However, even now - nine months after the hiring freeze was lifted - there are no active postings to fill these staffing vacancies.

Congress also provided \$68 million in FY 2017 for Consolidated Railroad Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grants, which can be used for PTC implementation. Nine months later, the Department has yet to issue the Notice of Funding Opportunity for this program, which means funding will almost certainly not be awarded prior to the PTC deadline. Expediently awarding funding for safety-critical infrastructure is necessary for commuter railroads who face major funding challenges implementing PTC.

While we understand the nominee for Administrator of the FRA has yet to be confirmed, we expect the Department and the FRA to continue to work diligently to execute Congressional directives on PTC implementation. We ask that you provide to the Committee on Appropriations the hiring plans for the PTC organization, as well as the anticipated schedule for CRISI grants.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,