

January 29, 2026

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman, House Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Dear Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chair Cruz, and Ranking Member Cantwell,

We are writing to oppose the inclusion of Railway Safety Act (RSA)–style mandates, or similar prescriptive rail regulations, in any surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

Surface transportation bills are intended to modernize infrastructure, improve mobility, and support economic growth. As such, they are not an appropriate vehicle for resurrecting rail mandates that have repeatedly failed to advance through Congress on their own merits and have even been set aside by the committees of jurisdiction due to concerns about cost, feasibility, and unintended consequences.

At a time when affordability dominates voter concerns and policymakers in both parties are focused on reducing costs across the economy, embedding RSA-style provisions in a must-pass transportation bill would amount to a vote against affordability.

Higher costs without demonstrated safety gains

RSA-style mandates would impose extensive new regulatory requirements on freight railroads and the broader supply chain without clear evidence of improved safety outcomes. That means higher operating costs, reduced flexibility, and higher prices for American consumers.

Freight rail is a critical backbone of the U.S. supply chain. Increases in rail costs flow directly into the price of food, fuel, building materials, manufactured goods, and energy. Adding new regulatory mandates to surface transportation legislation would undermine stated goals of affordability, competitiveness, and economic stability.



Prescriptive mandates undermine innovation

Another problem with prior RSA proposals is they relied on one-size-fits-all statutory mandates rather than data-driven, risk-based regulation, including:

- Crew-size mandates that would freeze current practices regardless of evolving technology or operational needs, despite no evidence such mandates would have prevented past accidents.
- Overbroad hazardous material definitions that would effectively classify most freight trains as hazmat trains, vastly expanding regulatory reach over routine operations.
- Inspection requirements focused on minimum time thresholds rather than inspection quality or outcomes.
- Technology prescriptions that risk locking in existing systems while discouraging next-generation safety innovation.

The rail industry's most significant safety and efficiency gains have come through private investment, operational flexibility, and technological advancement. Rigid statutory mandates would impede that progress.

A better approach

Surface transportation reauthorization should focus on modernizing and streamlining transportation policy, including updating or eliminating statutory provisions that are outdated, duplicative, or misaligned with current technologies and operating realities. Rather than layering new mandates onto an already complex regulatory framework, Congress should use this legislation to reduce unnecessary burdens and ensure federal law reflects the modern supply chain.

We urge Congress to keep RSA-style mandates out of surface transportation reauthorization and instead pursue policies that advance safety, affordability, and economic growth through flexibility, innovation, and sound governance.

Sincerely,

Iain Murray

Senior Fellow

Competitive Enterprise Institute

John Shelton
Vice President of Policy
Advancing American Freedom

Jim Carter
Director, Center for American Prosperity
(2021-23)
America First Policy Institute

Phil Kerpen
President
American Commitment

Kristen Walker
Senior Policy Analyst for Energy and
Transportation Policy
American Consumer Institute

Brent Gardner
Senior Vice President
Americans for Prosperity

Grover Norquist
President
Americans for Tax Reform

Ike Brannon
President
Capital Policy Analytics

Garrett Ballengee
President and CEO
Cardinal Institute for WV Policy

Ryan Ellis
President
Center for a Free Economy

Daniel J. Mitchell
President
Center for Freedom and Prosperity

Russ Brown
President
Center for Independent Employees

Timothy Lee
Senior Vice President of Legal
and Public Affairs
Center for Individual Freedom

David Ozgo
Executive Director
Center for Transportation Advancement
(CT4A)

The Honorable Ken Blackwell
Chairman
Conservative Action Project

Nick Loris
President
Conservative Coalition for Climate
Solutions (C3) Action

Matthew Kandrach
President
Consumer Action for a Strong Economy

Steve Forbes
Chairman and Editor-in-Chief – Forbes
Media
Co-Founder – Unleash Prosperity

Rusty Brown
Southern Director
Freedom Foundation

George Landrith
President
Frontiers of Freedom

Cameron Sholty
Executive Director
Heartland Impact

Mario H. Lopez
President
Hispanic Leadership Fund

Andrew Langer
President
Institute for Liberty

Tom Giovanetti
President
Institute for Policy Innovation (IPI)

Ian Adams
Executive Director
International Center for Law and
Economics

Seton Motley
President
Less Government

Matthew Gagnon
Chief Executive Officer
Maine Policy Institute

Charlie Sauer
President
Market Institute

Patrick A. McLaughlin
Research Fellow, Hoover Institution*
Visiting Research Fellow, Pacific Legal
Foundation*

Roslyn Layton
Senior Fellow
National Security Institute

Pete Sepp
President
National Taxpayers Union

John Tamny
President
Parkview Institute

Daniel J. Erspamer
Chief Executive Officer
Pelican Institute for Public Policy

Paul Gessing
President
Rio Grande Foundation

Karen Kerrigan
President & CEO
Small Business & Entrepreneurship
Council

Patrick Brenner
President and CEO
Southwest Public Policy Institute

Ross Marchand
Executive Director
Taxpayers Protection Alliance

*Affiliation for identification purposes only