

# 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.

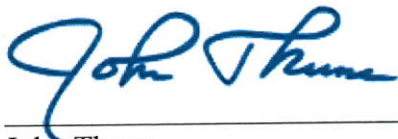
Significant safety improvement opportunities are present now, and urge you to embrace these opportunities to improve safety through the FRA's appropriate and timely handling of waiver and test program submissions. We look forward to your response and to working with you further on this and other issues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

Sincerely,



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Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator



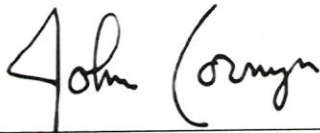
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John Thune  
United States Senator



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Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator



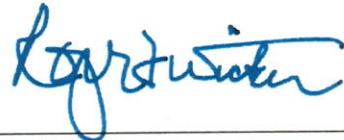
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John Cornyn  
United States Senator



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Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



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Roger Wicker  
United States Senator



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Cynthia M. Lummis  
United States Senator



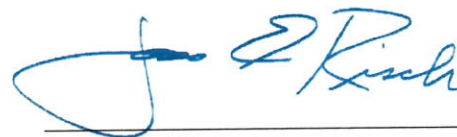
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Roger Marshall  
United States Senator



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Todd Young  
United States Senator



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James E. Risch  
United States Senator



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John Hoeven  
United States Senator



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Senator Blunt  
United States Senator



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Michael S. Lee  
United States Senator



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Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



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Jerry Moran  
United States Senator



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Bill Hagerty  
United States Senator



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Shelly Moore Capito  
United States Senator



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Deb Fischer  
United States Senator



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Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator



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Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator



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Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



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John Boozman  
United States Senator



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James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator