



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Bill Shuster
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member

Mathew M. Sturges, Staff Director

December 28, 2017

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

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

Dear Secretary Chao:

On December 18, Amtrak Cascades Train 501, operating from Seattle to Portland, derailed south of Tacoma, killing three people and injuring numerous others. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the lead investigator of the accident, the train was traveling approximately 80 miles per hour into a 30 mile-per-hour curve.

The circumstances surrounding this accident are eerily similar to the tragic 2015 derailment of an Amtrak Northeast Regional train in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, killing eight people and injuring more than 200 others, 11 critically. Within days of the accident, the NTSB announced that it would not have occurred had Positive Train Control (PTC) been operational on the line. While we do not yet know whether the Tacoma accident was PTC-preventable, it once again demonstrates the need for implementing PTC now.

Since 1969, the NTSB has investigated 151 accidents that would not have occurred had PTC been installed. These accidents resulted in 298 fatalities and 6,763 injuries (see attached). PTC has been on the NTSB's Most Wanted List of safety improvements since its inception in 1990.

We believe it is high time that the railroads implement PTC. It has been nearly a decade since passage of the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-432) which required freight, commuter, and intercity passenger railroads to implement PTC by December 31, 2015. That deadline was later extended to December 31, 2018. We understand that PTC is complex but there is no excuse for it taking this long and for some railroads to be lagging so far behind, as indicated in the progress reports submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration.

According to your website, only seven railroads will not meet the 2018 deadline: Trinity Rail Express in Texas (2019), Canadian National (2020), Central Florida Rail Corridor (2020), CSX (2020), Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (2020), Norfolk Southern (2020), and Metra in

Illinois (2020)¹. We find that hard to believe given the lack of progress by a host of other railroads in equipping locomotives, completing track segments, installing radio towers, training employees, acquiring spectrum, installing back office servers, and submitting safety plans for FRA's review and approval.² For example, Long Island Railroad, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, Consolidated Rail Corporation, Maryland Area Regional Commuter "MARC" trains, New Mexico Rail Runner Express, New Jersey Transit, Altamont Corridor Express, South Florida Regional Transportation (Tri-Rail), Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and Nashville Regional Transportation Authority are among a host of railroads that are significantly behind, but have projected a 2018 final implementation date in FRA-submitted reports.

Although the law allows you to extend the deadline for up to 24 months if the railroads meet certain criteria that we insisted upon, Congress always intended this extension to be used in limited circumstances. Yet a new graphic on your website seems to suggest that the Department of Transportation is tracking railroad efforts to meet the 2020 extension rather than holding them accountable for meeting the 2018 deadline.

Given the confusing and seemingly out-of-date information on your website, we request a detailed status update on where the railroads are in fully implementing PTC and when they will finally meet the mandate. We also request a briefing from you and your staff on this issue in the early part of January.

In addition, we strongly urge you to include robust funding in any infrastructure or other package the Administration sends to the Hill to help the commuter and intercity passenger railroads implement PTC. In 2016, the American Public Transportation Association estimated that PTC implementation would cost the commuter rail industry more than \$3.5 billion, yet only \$25 million was requested in the President's FY2018 Budget for a rail safety and infrastructure program that we created in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, which includes PTC as an eligible project. Congress has also only appropriated \$285 million for PTC, although we have long fought for more funding. We urge you to provide additional funding to help meet their needs. In the interim, we plan to introduce legislation in early January to address the significant funding gap and push the railroads to implement PTC.

Sincerely,



PETER DeFAZIO
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure



MICHAEL CAPUANO
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and
Hazardous Materials

¹ <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0628>

² <https://www.fra.dot.gov/app/ptc/>