

Freight Railroad Industry Priorities for Future COVID-19 Stimulus Packages

North America's freight railroads remain committed to rising to the challenges presented by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, including safeguarding the health and safety of our employees while safely delivering the goods America needs. As you continue to address this ongoing crisis and its impacts on American families and critical economic sectors, we urge Congress to consider the following priorities.

Focus on Funding and Reject Controversial Policy Riders

Freight railroads urge Congress to reject controversial policy riders in any upcoming stimulus legislation, including: harmful economic regulation; permitting longer or heavier trucks on our nation's roads and bridges; mandating specific operating models, such as minimum railroad crew size; and facilitating property takings of railroad rights-of-way for the speedy rollout of broadband service. We believe that now is not the time to seek inclusion of controversial matters; instead freight railroads are focused on helping to address this ongoing crisis and playing a key role in our nation's future economic recovery. It is essential that policies not be enacted that would undermine our industry's ability to safely and efficiently get our customers' goods to market, compete on an equal playing field with other modes of transportation, and improve and maintain our networks to meet the nation's freight transportation demand.

Increase Funding for Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Projects

Freight railroads appreciate the public's interest in grade crossing improvements and support providing a significant amount of funding to state and local governments for grade crossing improvement and separation projects should an infrastructure package be included as part of any upcoming stimulus legislation. Providing historic funding levels for the Section 130 Railway-Highway Crossings program or as part of a designated priority within the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program will help to stimulate the economy, while also meeting the significant, widespread demand for these vital safety and highway mobility improvement projects.

Ensure Parity in the Treatment of Rail Labor

Freight railroads are especially grateful to their roughly 150,000 employees for keeping the rail network running, and we thank Congress for including the needed updates to Railroad Unemployment Insurance (RUI) in the most recent COVID-19 stimulus bill that ensured that our employees were treated similarly to the rest of our nation's workforce. As you continue to identify solutions and policy that will help our nation's workers and families, we ask that you also consider removing RUI from the effects of sequester. RUI is the only unemployment insurance program subjected to those reductions which were enacted into law in the Budget Control Act of 2011. Unlike the average U.S. worker, railroad employees do not receive unemployment benefits through state-administered unemployment insurance programs. Instead, unemployed railroaders receive benefits through RUI, which is administered by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). Freight railroads also support providing additional administrative funding for the RRB to modernize its IT capabilities in order to better serve the needs of our employees, including improved processing of unemployment benefits.

Prioritize Access to Testing and Protective Equipment for Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers

Freight railroads prioritize the health and safety of their employees and diligently adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidance for reducing exposure to COVID-19. However, ongoing shortages of essential supplies remain a challenge. Freight railroads support S. 3728, The Critical Infrastructure Employee Protection Act of 2020, and believe that their employees, as well as other essential critical infrastructure workers, should be given priority access to testing, personal protective equipment, sanitizers, non-medical grade facial coverings, and other health-related or protective supplies necessary to safely keep America's goods moving.

Provide Funding to Amtrak and Intercity Passenger Rail for Critical Infrastructure

Freight railroads support providing funding for Amtrak and intercity passenger rail to maintain and replace current critical infrastructure.