

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jack Reed
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to Review Federal Rail Safety Programs
May 16, 2018**

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you, Chairman Collins, for holding this important hearing and showing such excellent leadership on this Subcommittee. I look forward to continuing our partnership this Congress as we work to invest in our national infrastructure in order to ensure that we have a safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system.

We are here on a very important topic, which is rail safety.

The news has covered several high-profile rail accidents over the past several months, some of which were Positive Train Control (or PTC)-preventable, including tragic fatal accidents in both Washington and South Carolina, in addition to frequent and dramatic highway-rail grade crossing collisions and trespassing deaths.

Beyond the headlines, the FRA has also been tracking concerning statistics regarding highway-rail grade crossings and trespasser incidents.

In 2017, 868 people died in rail-related accidents and incidents, with 245 of those occurring at highway-rail grade crossings and 590 from trespasser incidents. Both of those numbers are higher than in 2016.

In fact, sadly, a trespassing pedestrian was struck by an Amtrak train in Central Falls, Rhode Island just days ago and amazingly and thankfully survived.

Others, however, have not been as fortunate. This is the second incident in just a year and a half in Rhode Island alone. We need to address these challenges, while also providing assistance for the implementation of PTC.

We all recognize that the safety and efficiency of our rail systems are clearly linked to investment and oversight.

I am particularly proud of the rail investments and safety improvements we were able to make in the 2018 Omnibus.

This Subcommittee has increased funding for important safety programs, such as the Automatic Track Inspection Program and PTC oversight, at the FRA.

In 2018, we provided \$592 million for CRISI grants, with \$250 million set aside for PTC implementation. It was also particularly important that we made commuter rail agencies eligible for that PTC funding, since they have the greatest need for public assistance.

Unfortunately, the FRA decided to issue a notice of funding opportunity for only the \$250 million minimum set-aside for PTC and to hold back more than \$340 million of the remaining 2018 CRISI funding, unnecessarily delaying important safety and infrastructure projects.

PTC implementation is an eligible activity for the rest of the CRISI funding, as are highway-rail grade crossing improvements that would save lives. The decision to withhold the majority of the CRISI funding will confuse grantees, delay critical infrastructure investments, and waste time that could be spent building projects that address the other safety challenges that cause the greatest number of deaths on our railroads. I am disappointed by the decision to separate the PTC funds, and strongly encourage the FRA to award all of the funding we provided quickly and thoughtfully to address the safety risks that we face as a nation.

In 2018, we also funded Amtrak at the highest level ever in an annual appropriations bill, with a special focus on the Northeast Corridor where there is a \$38 billion state-of-good-repair backlog. We funded the Federal State Partnership for State-of-Good-Repair program at \$250 million, the highest level ever in a single appropriation, as well.

Both of those programs are critical to upgrading and replacing century-old assets on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, which connects a region that contributes 20 percent of America's GDP.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that this Administration has incorrectly labeled these programs and the critical projects they address on the Northeast Corridor as local, urban concerns.

These are not local projects. They are projects of national significance, and this Administration has done a disservice to safety and economic opportunity for Americans all along the East Coast through their intentional bureaucratic delays. The Department of Transportation must do better as these projects move closer to construction.

In summary, Congress has done its part. Now, the Administration needs to get down to work and expeditiously implement these programs and award grants to the railroads and agencies that need them.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses about their state-of-good-repair and safety challenges, as well as the best practices and opportunities for improvement on America's rail network. Rail safety is an area where we have broad bipartisan agreement.

As this Subcommittee looks to 2019, your ideas and experiences will help to inform our funding decisions to make America's rail system safer and more efficient. Thank you, Chairman Collins.