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September 10, 2009

The Honorable Corrine Brown, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
United States House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2336 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Brown:

On behalf of the States for Passenger Rail Coalition (S4PRC), I would like thank you for your leadership on passenger rail issues. Your roundtable discussion on the connection between passenger rail development and economic development was helpful to states that are implementing passenger rail and are working to address these issues. A strong intercity rail system requires a robust support industry. We support you in your efforts to secure a steady, continuing stream of annual capital funding for intercity passenger rail.

As part of the roundtable you invited the S4PRC to offer suggestions for the rail section of Surface Transportation Authorization Act of 2009. We propose that the US Code 49, chapter 261 be amended to create a "State Planning and Research Program." This chapter includes Section 301 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA).

PRIIA focuses heavily on planning issues. For example, the law requires a National Rail Plan (NRP) be created and the NRP will be composed in part of "approved" state rail plans. State rail planning is still in the early stages of development. Based on our collective experience with the application process for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, we believe that the practice of state intercity passenger rail planning requires annual, dedicated funding to advance states' planning and construction efforts. The Federal Highway Administration's State Planning and Research funding program can serve as a model.

More specifically, we propose that two percent of the authorized annual funds for Section 301 be set aside for a State Rail Planning and Research program. These funds should be distributed equally among the states. The total amount of funding that an individual state could receive could be capped at \$1 million per year. I suggest that states be given a wide flexibility in the use of the funds; for example, a portion of the funds could be pooled to meet common needs and concerns.

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Further, the SPRC recommends that \$1.5 million be authorized for state rail planning and research grants that could be awarded in three areas: (1) coordination with non-motorized transportation; (2) context-sensitive design and (3) environmental justice planning directed at incorporating the needs of traditionally underserved communities in planning for intercity passenger development and operation. These grants would be awarded on a competitive basis.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the advantages of this strategy. Development of a strong planning process ensures a careful, prudent use of tax payer dollars and helps create a strong, national intercity passenger rail system. I look forward to working with you on this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Busalacchi
Secretary