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August 9, 2010

The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John L. Mica
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica:

On behalf of leading business organizations in the Northeast, we respectfully write to request that the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee consider holding a hearing on rail service along the main line of the Northeast Corridor (NEC).

The Northeast "Megaregion" accounts for roughly one-fifth of the nation's gross domestic product and nearly 20 percent of the population. Subsequently, the NEC's roadways and airspace consistently rank among the most congested in the country. Economic growth depends on the ability to move people and goods quickly and reliably between urban centers, thus the reduction of congestion and the improvement of rail service is a necessary precondition for economic recovery. While Congress should be commended for its recent support of high-speed rail and Amtrak, we believe such a hearing would produce a constructive dialogue between lawmakers and business leaders about ways to overcome current barriers that limit the effectiveness of rail service along the NEC.

Amtrak's Acela line is the only high-speed rail provider in North America, yet the main line of the NEC has not been designated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) as a high-speed rail corridor. Additionally, before any significant upgrades of high-speed rail service can be initiated along the corridor's main line, the FRA must complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). Without a completed PEIS, the only existing high-speed rail line in the United States is excluded from receiving funds, authorized by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, designed to develop high-speed rail. We request that you consider holding a hearing that includes a discussion on expediting the PEIS so that the NEC can begin receiving funding dedicated to making necessary upgrades as we pursue a true high-speed rail network in the United States.

Our concerns, however, are not limited to a future high-speed rail network. Conventional rail service is being threatened as the age of Amtrak's rolling stock jeopardizes the safety and reliability of rail service. Some of Amtrak's current stock of railcars and equipment was built in the 1950s, and even Amtrak's newest equipment is over a decade old. Replacing train cars requires a three to five-year lead time, therefore it is crucial for

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Amtrak to implement its comprehensive fleet plan now so that replacements can be in production before the current rolling stock must be retired. Despite Amtrak's request of \$2.6 billion for fiscal year 2011, the House has only provided \$1.7 billion, nearly a billion dollars less than Amtrak's stated needs. We need you, our Congressional leaders, to conduct a hearing that assesses Amtrak's needs and examines the effects of aging equipment on the safety and reliability of the nation's rail carrier.

The Secretary of Transportation recently stated that the Obama Administration's principles for reauthorization of the federal surface transportation programs could be released within 90 days. If true, Congress will resume consideration of reauthorization at a time when economic recovery, job creation, and environmental responsibility dominate the national agenda. A hearing that addresses rail service on the NEC will not only be timely but will serve as an excellent starting point for the drafting of a truly transformational reauthorization bill.

We thank you for your consideration of this request for a hearing on rail service in the Northeast Corridor and look forward to working with you on this important matter.



Robert Wonderling
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Chamber of Commerce
Chairman, CEO Council for Growth



Robert Yaro
President
Regional Plan Association, Inc.