September 29, 2015

The Honorable John A. Boehner  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi,

The statutory deadline for the full implementation of positive train control (PTC) safety technology is rapidly approaching, and it is clear that our nation’s passenger and freight railroads are unable to meet the deadline. To avert a major disruption of passenger and freight rail service that will have far reaching consequences for American commuters, businesses, and our economy, Congress must act now to extend the upcoming PTC deadline with a clear timeline that keeps railroads accountable and allows for the responsible implementation of this critical safety technology.

Implementing positive train control is vitally important to ensuring that our national rail system provides the utmost level of safety for the millions of passengers around the country that depend on rail to travel and get to work every day and the thousands of American businesses that rely on rail to move their goods. However, when this technology was mandated in the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, the arbitrary deadline set by Congress for implementation did not reflect the high costs and technological challenges of developing and deploying the new technology on approximately 60,000 miles of track around the country.

Despite numerous challenges, railroads have made great strides towards implementation. To date, the freight industry has invested more than $5 billion with another $4 billion set to be spent to complete installation. Our already cash strapped public commuter railroads have spent over $950 million on PTC and conservative estimates are that $3.48 billion more is needed to get the job done. Despite that need, Congress has only appropriated $50 million for this priority safety mandate, and half of the country’s commuter railroads are being forced to defer other safety and capital improvements in order to afford the costs of PTC.

A recent report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirms what commuter railroads, the freight industry, and numerous government agencies have warned for years: the upcoming statutory deadline is unrealistic, and despite the best efforts of freight and passenger rail, implementing PTC nationwide by the end of this year is simply impossible.

Unless Congress acts soon to extend the deadline, passenger and freight railroads will have to shut down operations around the country. Without congressional action, the hundreds of thousands of passengers who rely on commuter rail to get to work every day will have to find alternate means of travel, crowding already congested roads, increasing costs to local communities, and disproportionately affecting low income Americans. Shutting down the
country’s freight network would also have devastating consequences to our nation’s economy, affecting thousands of businesses across a wide spectrum of industries and producing shortages of essential goods. The shutdown could make it difficult for cities to purify drinking water without the availability of chlorine and for farmers to tend to their crops without access to fertilizer.

Given the widespread impact to our economy, we believe this matter requires immediate attention. Due to complex logistics, Americans could begin to see the effects of the disruption weeks prior to the deadline with railroads, shippers, and agricultural suppliers stopping operations and closing facilities in early December or sooner. Congress cannot afford to wait until the last minute to act and should explore all legislative options to get the job done as soon as possible. Only Congress has the authority to extend the deadline and avert a major disruption of passenger and freight rail service. We must act now to extend the upcoming PTC deadline while holding passenger and freight railroads accountable and providing them with a clear plan for implementing this vital safety technology.

Sincerely,

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress
Ralph Lee Abraham  
Member of Congress

Diane Black  
Member of Congress

Robert B. Aderholt  
Member of Congress

Marsha Blackburn  
Member of Congress

Rick W. Allen  
Member of Congress

Rod Blum  
Member of Congress

Brad Ashford  
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Earl Blumenauer  
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Lou Barletta  
Member of Congress

Charles W. Boustany, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Andy Barr  
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Dave Brat  
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown  
Member of Congress

Rob Bishop  
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Ken Buck  
Member of Congress
Larry Bucshon
Member of Congress

G.K. Butterfield
Member of Congress

Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress

Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress

Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress

John C. Carney, Jr.
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver
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Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Tom Cole
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Chris Collins
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Doug Collins
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Barbara Comstock
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K. Michael Conaway
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Gerald E. Connolly
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Jim Cooper
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Jim Costa
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Kevin Cramer
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Eric A. “Rick” Crawford
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Cresent Hardy
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Henry Cuellar
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Danny K. Davis
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John J. Duncan, Jr.
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Blake Farenthold
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Bill Flores
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Bill Foster
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Laura Frankel
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John Garamendi
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Jim Jordan
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Raúl R. Labrador
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David P. Joyce
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Barbara Lee
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Mike Kelly
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Sheila Jackson Lee
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Robin L. Kelly
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Daniel Lipinski
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Trent Kelly
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Billy Long
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Derek Kilmer
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Frank D. Lucas
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Adam Kinzinger
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Blaine Luetkemeyer
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Ann Kirkpatrick
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Ted S. Yoho  
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Robert Hurt
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James E. Clyburn
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