

September 8, 2022

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Commerce, Science and Transportation
Committee
U.S. Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Commerce, Science and Transportation
Committee
U.S. Senate
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1135 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Cantwell, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Wicker, and Ranking Member Graves:

Railroads and rail labor have until September 16 to reach an agreement that would prevent a lockout or strike after the Presidential Emergency Board published a proposed settlement on August 17. If an agreement is not reached during this 30-day period, we strongly urge Congress to act to avoid significant economic damage to U.S. supply chains and further uncertainty for rail customers.

The farmers, ranchers, food and beverage manufacturers, processors, package suppliers, farm supply dealers and agricultural marketers that comprise our collective memberships support and sustain millions of American jobs. Our members provide safe, abundant, affordable, and sustainably produced human and animal food, fiber, and agricultural goods essential to the health and well-being of tens of millions of U.S. and global consumers. Reliable railroad freight transportation is essential to meet these objectives.

The U.S. rail network moves critical agricultural inputs and significant quantities of agricultural products. These essential items are transported by rail to domestic facilities and to ports for export abroad. A complete stoppage of the rail system would lead to shutdowns or slowdowns of rail-dependent facilities resulting in devastating consequences to our national and global food security.

Leaders around the world are already concerned about food shortages and famine due to drought and geopolitical challenges, such as the invasion of Ukraine, which accounts for ten percent of the global exports of wheat. A freight rail stoppage would occur as America's farmers harvest their crops and would exacerbate global food insecurity and likely contribute to further geopolitical instability in regions that experience famine. Congress must be willing to act to ensure our farmers and ranchers can continue to help feed the world.

The freight rail system already is significantly challenged and many rail customers are not receiving timely rail service. A complete stoppage of rail service, even for a single day, would escalate these challenges. Most freight railroads currently lack extra capacity to make up for down time. Thus, a sizable portion of freight backlogged due to a stoppage may never be made up leading to less production from rail-dependent businesses to the detriment of producers and consumers.

Moreover, inflation is impacting all Americans. A freight rail stoppage would drastically make inflation worse, especially for those who can least afford it.

Therefore, we urge Congress to prepare to intervene, if necessary, to prevent a rail stoppage of any duration. Uninterrupted rail service is vital to the American agricultural economy, and we thank you for your responsiveness to this potentially significant supply chain issue.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Transportation Working Group

Agricultural Retailers Association

Amcot

American Bakers Association

American Cotton Producers

American Farm Bureau Federation

American Feed Industry Association

American Malting Barley Association

American Pulse Association

American Soybean Association

Consumer Brands Association

International Dairy Foods Association

National Aquaculture Association

National Association of Wheat Growers

National Barley Growers Association

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

National Corn Growers Association

National Cotton Council

National Cotton Ginners Association

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Grain and Feed Association

National Grange

National Milk Producers Federation

National Sunflower Association

North American Millers' Association

Soy Transportation Coalition

The Fertilizer Institute

USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council

USA Rice

U.S. Canola Association

US Pea & Lentil Trade Association

US Rice Producers Association

cc: Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Members
cc: House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Members