

TESTIMONY OF
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**REGARDING Staying on Track: Next Steps in
Improving Passenger and Freight Rail Safety**

BEFORE THE
**Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation**
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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Thune, for inviting me to participate in this hearing. I am Michelle Teel, the Missouri Department of Transportation's Multimodal Operations Director. I'm so pleased to be here to share the state experience of freight and passenger rail safety in America's transportation system. The nation's rail system is an essential part of surface transportation. Missouri has a long history with railroads, from James Eads building the first Mississippi River railroad bridge to the Jesse James gang robbing trains to today's unit trains carrying oil from northern hydraulic fracking operations, Missouri's railroads have seen and done it all.

I am here today to share Missouri's unique story regarding railroads and railroad safety.

MISSOURI'S RAIL SYSTEM

Missouri is the fourth most rail intensive state. In 2012, Missouri railroads carried 438 million tons of goods, more than any other mode in our state, even trucks. This amount of freight equates to nearly 11 million fully loaded trucks. If lined up end-to-end, they would circle the earth six times.

Missouri's central US location makes it the crossroads for freight. Missouri is home to the second and third largest U.S. rail hubs in Kansas City and St. Louis, respectively. Missouri is second only to Chicago, Illinois. These figures are based on size. If tonnage is used for comparison; Kansas City's terminal experiences the most tonnage in the U.S. Missouri has 4,000 miles of main line track, 7,000 public and private rail crossings, four intercity passenger rail routes, and six of the nation's seven Class I railroads operate in Missouri. With such a massive amount of rail traffic, the potential for danger is around every corner and in every rail yard.

Just three weeks ago, in southeast Missouri, a Union Pacific train collided with a Burlington Northern Santa Fe train at a railroad diamond intersection. When these two trains collided, they also hit a MoDOT bridge causing it to collapse. A total of seven people were involved in the incident and, amazingly, the worst injury was a

broken bone, but this incident speaks to the importance of railroad safety and the need to systematically and constantly work to improve it.

One week after this incident, a barge carrying an extremely large crane (being used on a MoDOT bridge replacement project) broke loose. It floated down river, took out major power lines and became wedged under and against Norfolk Southern's Missouri River crossing in St. Louis. It took nearly three days to remove the crane. Norfolk Southern's midwestern train operations came to a grinding halt. Interstate commerce is a driver of the Missouri and U.S. economy. Incidents like these can have far reaching consequences.

FREIGHT RAIL SAFETY

Missouri is one of a handful of states with strict state railroad safety regulations. They include requirements for operating practices, reporting, grade crossing safety, tariffs, train equipment, and training. Missouri assesses each operating railroad for intrastate revenue to fund four railroad safety inspectors. Each of these safety inspectors specializes in disciplines to ensure coverage of the state regulations. Because MoDOT railroad safety inspectors become certified inspectors through the Federal Railroad Administration's program, they also enforce federal regulations. If you recall, I mentioned there are approximately 4,000 miles of main line track in Missouri. This is an immense amount of territory for four inspectors to cover, so we coordinate closely with the Federal Railroad Administration inspectors.

Another area of concern is grade-crossing safety. Missouri has 3,800 public crossings scattered statewide. They require significant attention. From 2008 to 2012, there were 192 grade crossing incidents resulting in 41 fatalities. This put Missouri as fifth-worst in the U.S. The funding Congress provides for improving these crossings makes up approximately 80 percent of the funds MoDOT has available for this purpose. This is very important to Missouri and I urge you to continue to invest in these critical safety improvements. To give you some scale, Missouri receives approximately \$6 million per year in federal highway funding for 3,800 public crossings. The state invests approximately \$1.2 million. Railroads have never been safer, but there is still much to do.

Safety data is a key tool used to address railroad safety. This data helps our MoDOT railroad staff prioritize crossing improvements. It also helps our railroad

safety inspectors focus on particular regions of the state, given what the data is showing. For example, in 2012, MoDOT focused on 11 of Missouri's 114 counties. More than 50 percent of all railroad incidents occurred within these counties. Through engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency medical services, Missouri makes every attempt to use the data to be as strategic as possible with limited resources.

PASSENGER RAIL SAFETY

Missouri is home to four passenger rail routes. The *Missouri River Runner* is the state-sponsored route from Kansas City to St. Louis. There are also two national routes, the *Texas Eagle* and the *Southwest Chief*. Finally, Illinois' state sponsored *Lincoln Service* originates in St. Louis, Missouri. These routes are experiencing ridership growth. There is a need for continued investment to help ensure the safety of the passengers and crews. In addition, continued investment is needed to address capacity issues. Both freight and intercity passenger rail are experiencing growth in the same corridor.

The *Missouri River Runner's* growth is exceptional since 2007. Ridership is up 74 percent, ticket revenue is up 112 percent, on-time performance is around 90 percent and customer satisfaction for the route has gone from last in the country to seventh. The railroad the *Missouri River Runner* operates on is a Union Pacific road which is also seeing increases in traffic. MoDOT is committed to ensuring the viability and safety of both freight and passenger movements.

Missouri was awarded \$50 million in the Federal Railroad Administration's High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program funding. This leveraged another \$20 million in investment from host railroads. These investments along the *Missouri River Runner* route target on-time performance and safety for both freight and passenger rail. They have and will continue to contribute to both of these goals for the foreseeable future. However, continued investment in passenger rail is necessary to address increasing passenger movements.

Passenger rail safety also comes in the way of equipment. Missouri, Illinois, California and Michigan all worked as a team to acquire new and safer passenger rail equipment, which is currently in the procurement process. Without federal investment, this new equipment would not be possible. Missouri is an active

member in the Next Generation Equipment Committee and committed to the goals and objectives of this important body, consisting of the FRA, Amtrak and interested states.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to share information on Missouri's role in freight and passenger rail safety. The opportunities for additional rail investment are tremendous. Missouri recently completed a state rail plan which identified \$1.4 billion in unmet needs for passenger and freight rail. I urge you to continue investment in railroads, as it is key to the success of America's transportation system and economy.