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The Honorable Sarah Feinberg
Acting Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, Southeast
Washington, District of Columbia 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Feinberg:

Last week's tragic collision between a Metro-North train and an SUV driver is another reminder of the urgent need to ensure we're using the most advanced technology available to protect passengers and communities while also investing in our nation's aging rail infrastructure. Our current surface transportation bill expires at the end of May, and I'm committed to making sure that rail safety is part of any new legislation reauthorizing our surface transportation programs. Likewise, I'm committed to making sure any new bill provides the funding we need to ensure our rail network is ready for the twenty-first century.

To achieve these goals, it's critical that we take advantage of the financing tools that currently exist and unlock potential wherever we can find it, such as in FRA's Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) program. This program is authorized to loan up to \$35 billion and fund up to 100 percent of a rail project's costs. These loans also come with low interest rates and with no cost to federal taxpayers. RRIF could be especially helpful for major safety projects, such as helping railroads install life-saving Positive Train Control (PTC) technology throughout the Metro-North system and rebuilding aging bridges and structures on the Northeast Corridor.

Incomprehensibly, the RRIF program leaves unused most available funding. Based on the latest numbers, FRA has issued loans totaling just \$1.7 billion – a tiny fraction of what FRA is authorized to lend. This huge lost opportunity is mindboggling and misguided. A report this summer from the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (OIG) details several reasons why the program fails to perform as Congress intended. According to the OIG, FRA provides insufficient guidance to applicants, inconsistent procedures in reviewing loan requests, inadequate tracking of loan applications, and an overly cumbersome evaluation process. The OIG notes consistent "discouragement" and "frustration" on the part of applicants.

For Connecticut and the region I represent, the consequences of these failings are enormous. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and Metro-North Railroad have sought RRIF funds to implement a PTC system. As you know, FRA and the NTSB have

concluded that PTC could have prevented disasters like the Spuyten Duyvil crash in 2013. In addition, it's possible that a future version of PTC would be able to prevent the type of disaster we witnessed in Valhalla last week. But MTA's application has sat with the FRA for years. These applications must be approved to move swiftly and efficiently so that important safety work and rebuilding efforts can move forward unimpeded.

In response to the OIG report, FRA stated it had implemented reforms and was moving forward with other steps to fix an unacceptably long application process. Please inform me of the status of these reforms, and, more importantly, the results of these efforts since the OIG report was released over the summer. Regarding RRIF, much more can be done, so I am eager for your response. I am also eager to learn of any additional ways that this important program can be reformed to better serve our country's transportation priorities, especially any measures that Congress can take to ensure we use every possible tool to achieve vital safety and investment goals.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate