



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad
Administration**

Administrator

**1120 Vermont Ave., NW.
Washington, DC 20590**

JUN 22 2006

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta
Secretary
U. S. Department of Transportation
400 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Mineta:

On May 16, 2005, you announced the Department's National Rail Safety Action Plan to improve the safety of the nation's freight railroad operations. I am pleased to report that one year later the Federal Railroad Administration has made real and substantial progress in implementing the plan's many components.

For example, the National Inspection Plan (NIP) has been adopted for all five FRA safety disciplines. The NIP will have a long-lasting impact as it makes better use of available inspection resources and accident data in such a way to identify potential safety "hot spots" before an unsafe condition arises. A reduction in both the number of accidents and the accident rate is expected once the NIP has been fully implemented and its application is refined with real-life experience.

Other action items completed during the plan's first year include: the demonstration of vehicle-mounted photo imaging technology to identify hard to detect cracks in rail joint bars; the testing of wireless communications technology to monitor when track switches are left in the wrong position in non-signaled or dark territory; a pilot project to ensure emergency responders have accurate and timely information about train accidents involving hazardous materials; and assisting the state of Louisiana with the development of its own highway-rail grade crossing safety action plan to reduce collisions and fatalities.

In addition, progress has been made on all remaining action items. Several are expected to reach completion by the end of 2006, including: publication of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking addressing human factor caused train accidents; the start of a "close call" pilot project to learn from incidents that could have caused a train accident but did not; release of a final report on validation of a fatigue model to improve train crew scheduling practices; and delivery of two additional automated track inspection vehicles allowing FRA to triple the number of track-miles inspected each year.

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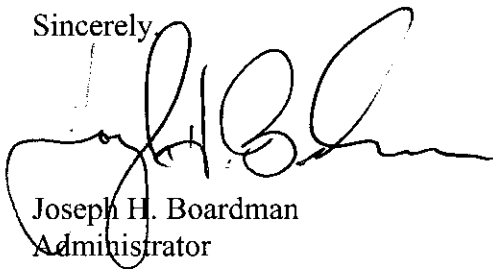
The final action item focused on research into hazardous materials tank car structural integrity, is ongoing. FRA has provided additional funding to the project so it can be completed a year earlier in 2007, rather than 2008, as originally anticipated.

And, of course, the completion of an action item does not mean an end to FRA attention to that issue. We are choosing to extend pilot projects, seeking enhancements to tested technologies, and using the results of each initiative to guide our 'next step' decisions. .

In attempting to evaluate the success of the National Rail Safety Action Plan, a review of one-year accident data is not particularly useful or meaningful. The action plan is comprehensive and will require some time for its various components to take hold in the industry. However, it has served a positive function in focusing FRA on achieving well-defined goals in support of our mission to continually improve freight rail safety.

I look forward to providing you future progress reports regarding our ongoing implementation of the National Rail Safety Action Plan.

Sincerely,



Joseph H. Boardman
Administrator

Enclosure