



Surface Transportation Board
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

Office of the Chairman

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Cantwell:

Thank you for your recent letter inquiring about efforts being taken by the Surface Transportation Board (STB or Board) in response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Board is committed to protecting the health and safety of its workforce while ensuring that essential agency operations continue undisrupted to the greatest extent possible.

First and foremost is the health and safety of our staff. The Board has been closely monitoring all federal information, guidance, and directives, particularly from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All such information is disseminated promptly, primarily through email, to our 130-person staff, all of whom are based at our Washington, DC headquarters. In addition, we are in communication with our building management and tenant committee, and provide updates to our staff as new information is received. As encouraged by the CDC, meetings with outside stakeholders and others are being conducted via teleconferencing or videoconferencing. And we are working with our staff to ensure that their individual circumstances and requests are addressed through workplace flexibilities.

As part of our COVID-19 preparedness, we want to make sure that all essential operations of the agency can be performed through telework should access to our headquarters building be impacted. Accordingly, the Board has updated its Telework Program Policy, as recommended to all agencies by OPM, and all eligible employees are being strongly encouraged to participate in the program. Staff has been instructed to leave the office each day fully prepared to telework the following day, should the need arise.

The Board has adopted a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that, in appropriate circumstances, supersedes all other operational plans. The COOP relies on teleworking to enable the agency to carry out mission-essential functions. The COOP addresses the impacts of a pandemic by removing workplace person-to-person contact for the duration of any public health emergency that would impact STB operations.

With respect to agency travel, at this time no staff or Board member travel has been approved through May. We will continue to monitor all guidance regarding travel in the weeks ahead and take all appropriate action to limit risk to staff and stakeholders. With respect to personal travel, we have urged staff to ensure that they have up-to-date domestic and/or overseas travel information from the travel advisory sites of the CDC and Department of State. When we have been made aware of personal international trips taken by STB staff recently, the individuals have self-quarantined.

We continue to review the STB's rules and regulations to determine whether any actions on our part would "mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission." The Board's principal role concerns the economic regulation of freight rail transportation; the agency does not set or regulate passenger fares. No regulatory action is required by the Board at this time to relax, except, or waive any provisions to help mitigate or manage the COVID-19 threat. However, the Board stands ready to timely assist its stakeholders should specific action become warranted.

Thank you for your interest in the Board's efforts during this challenging time. Be assured that the Board will continue to closely monitor this fluid and evolving situation and is committed to taking appropriate action, as needed, to meet the needs of our staff, our stakeholders, and the public. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me at 202-245-0204.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann Begeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ann Begeman
Chairman