United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2015

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Collins and Ranking Member Reed,

As you begin consideration of the Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to support robust funding for the Safe Transportation of Energy Products Program and related authorities, the multifaceted approach to crude-by-rail safety by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). We strongly support cross-modal coordinating dollars as well as individual account increases within the related agencies to address this critical safety issue. In addition, we ask that you support the Local Rail Facilities and Safety Grant Program to help small railroads and stations make critical infrastructure improvements.

As you know, five years ago, our nation's railroads hauled very little crude oil by rail. Now, railroads transport approximately one-tenth of U.S. crude oil output – approximately 1.1 million barrels per day. The rail system in the United States has seen a massive increase in crude-by-rail since 2007 driven in large part by remarkable increases in energy development from the Bakken Formation in North Dakota and Montana. In light of several tragic accidents involving crude-by-rail trains – including the most recent derailments and explosions of tanker cars carrying crude oil in West Virginia and Illinois – communities stretching across our country from the Midwest to coastal ports and refineries are rightly concerned about the safe movement of these combustible products.

The Safe Transportation of Energy Products Program would provide U.S. Department of Transportation the resources to address critical safety issues related to the transportation of Bakken crude and other energy products. This program includes providing additional crude oil route safety managers, inspectors and tank car specialists at FRA, special agents at FMCSA to provide additional oversight of energy product transportation, and additional safety equipment, training, and outreach through PHMSA. Along with these personnel and resource additions, the Local Rail Facilities and Safety Program will provide critical infrastructure improvements to facilities handling tank cars, particularly to small stations. Protecting our communities from the hazard posed by crude-by-rail requires close coordination and investment across U.S. Department of Transportation programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical program, which will give U.S. Department of Transportation the flexibility and resources it needs to promote public safety, react quickly to emerging issues, and protect communities across our country from future tragedies involving the movement of energy products.

Sincerely,

MARIA E. CANTWELL
United States Senator

HEIDI HEITKAMP
United States Senator

RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator

TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator

RON WYDEN
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