

Your source of independent thought  
and analysis on rail policy...



February 5, 2021

Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Virginia Rail Policy Institute congratulates you on your appointment as United States Secretary of Transportation. We wish you much success in transforming our nation's transportation system to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the waning days of Secretary Elaine Chao's term, the United States Department of Transportation issued the *National Freight Strategic Plan*. Many years in the making, this plan falls far short of delegating any new mobility responsibilities to the rail freight industry over the next quarter century beyond the status quo and maintaining rail freight's meager market share.

VRPI has prepared and enclosed a three-page *National Freight Strategic Plan Critique*, which calls for the US DOT to take the lead in fostering greater reliance on the rail mode for freight transportation as the United States transitions to a carbon-free global economy.

Much of the rail mode's ability to leverage new technologies and operating practices will depend on implementing high-performance infrastructure and uniform engineering specifications across the corridors of national significance. The 1956 *Eisenhower National Interstate and Defense Highways Act* is a compelling example of this approach. A rail example you may be familiar with is the South Shore Railroad's double-tracking project, which implements uniform, high-performance engineering standards throughout.

Former Federal Railroad Administrators Gil Carmichael and Joe Boardman each in their time promoted visions of a uniform national rail system of electrified corridors for shared use by both freight and passenger rail. We encourage you to pick up where Carmichael's *Steel Interstate* left off, enunciating a new federal vision for the rail mode (perhaps the Biden National Steel Interstate System).

The Virginia Rail Policy Institute also encourages you to adopt the policy that rail's 21st century role is to provide time-sensitive freight and passenger capacity in corridors of national significance where highway dependency is prohibitively expensive and/or environmentally detrimental.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Meredith Richards". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Meredith Richards  
President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Testerman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Michael Testerman  
Executive Director

Enclosure

C.c.: Warren Flatau, FRA Deputy Dir., Public Affairs  
FRA Office of Railroad Policy and Development