



American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association

December 8, 2023

Chair Brian Schatz
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Cindy Hyde-Smith
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Schatz and Ranking Member Hyde-Smith:

The short line freight rail industry is grateful for your strong, bipartisan leadership in providing robust levels of funding for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements program (CRISI) in the Senate-passed version of the Fiscal Year 2024 transportation and housing spending bill. Your measure reflects the widespread popularity of the program and its effectiveness in improving safety, strengthening the supply chain and creating economic opportunities in urban and rural communities nationwide. The more than 600 small railroads that make up our industry are concerned, however, about language in the measure's report concerning the Short Line Safety Institute (SLSI). I write to encourage you to modify the report language to ensure that SLSI can continue to build on its success and carry out enhanced training efforts to improve the safety culture at short line railroads nationwide.

SLSI has been instrumental in improving safety culture at Class II and III freight railroads. SLSI provides critical training, education, research and assessments, and these efforts enhance safety practices and prevent injuries and accidents. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has been a key partner of SLSI for nearly a decade since this effort was first wisely envisioned by current committee Vice Chair Susan Collins and Chair Patty Murray in 2014.

SLSI demonstrates its value time and again. An independent analysis by USDOT's Volpe Center in 2023 found that for a sample of 20 railroads that experienced initial SLSI assessments and then follow-up assessments years later, "Each railroad in the sample demonstrated evidence of safety culture growth." While enhancing safety is a perpetual process, SLSI yields real results that lead to a safer freight network.

With rail safety a subject of considerable discussion this year, it would be relevant and responsive to ensure SLSI has the resources necessary to carry out even more robust safety efforts—especially related to the transportation of hazardous materials. Additional resources of \$2.5 million would enable SLSI to incorporate two additional safety trains into its set of training tools. The Fiscal Year 2024 transportation spending bill pending in the House of Representatives recognizes this need and ensures FRA can provide these resources, directing \$5,000,000 to the FRA so SLSI can obtain and maintain the additional trains, in addition to funding its time-tested program. The Senate measure, however, recommends just half of

what the House measure recommends, keeping next year's level flat at \$2.5 million. Historically, this is a program that the Senate has lead on.

As bipartisan, bicameral discussions move forward concerning a long-term transportation and housing spending bill, we urge you to adopt the higher level on SLSI funding language so the Institute can help even more railroads all across the country improve their safety performance. Modified language in the report—along with the current tremendous support for strong CRISI funding levels in the bill—would ensure a remarkably powerful investment in the safety and efficiency of short line freight rail.

We appreciate your close attention to this matter and your strong leadership on transportation policy.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Baker', written in a cursive style.

Chuck Baker
President, ASLRRRA