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The Honorable Bill Shuster, Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
United States House of Representatives
2209 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I recently met with representatives of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) who briefed me on an agreement the Authority has reached with CSX to separate SEPTA's West Trenton Regional Rail service from freight activity on a six mile segment of CSX-owned track in my district. Shared-track activities currently supported on this segment are an impediment to efficient operations and capacity growth, and the situation has been made more urgent with the approaching Positive Train Control (PTC) deadline. If the necessary funding is not identified and the separation project cannot be completed in conjunction with PTC implementation, an important window will close and the segment will not be positioned for the future.

The West Trenton Line is SEPTA's third-highest ridership route and ranks fourth in service volume with 57 scheduled weekday passenger trains. According to SEPTA, daily ridership has grown by nearly 2,000 riders over the past decade and future steady growth is anticipated. The shared segment is also a vital link in CSX's north-south network, connecting New Jersey, New York and New England with the southeastern United States. Locally, the Port of Philadelphia and the lower Delaware River oil refineries will rely increasingly on freight rail transportation, and CSX expects increased traffic well above the 20 daily trains currently operating through the segment today. The challenges on this corridor are fast becoming unworkable under the current operating arrangement.

The plan SEPTA and CSX have developed would physically separate each entity's operations and assign one of the existing tracks to SEPTA and the other to CSX. The plan also calls for the partial restoration of a third track exclusively for SEPTA's use that was formerly within the right-of-way. Removing the last segment of the line on which both freight and passenger rail jointly operate, eliminates a significant choke point while providing both railroads with proprietary control of train movements and dispatching, capacity maintenance and growth, increased passenger rail speeds, and the ability for SEPTA to make future ADA improvements at a reasonable cost at their Yardley and West Trenton Stations.

The significant technical challenges related to PTC implementation and functionality in shared-track operations have accelerated the need for separation. The freight and passenger rail PTC technologies are fundamentally different and compatibility is a formidable challenge. Without separation, the six mile segment on the West Trenton Line will be the only portion of the entire SEPTA track network that will not support the Amtrak-compatible PTC technology. Under the separation plan, the two tracks would remain adjacent but each serve a different railroad – one track carrying SEPTA trains using Amtrak's ACSES technology; the other carrying CSX trains using the freight industry's IETMS technology.

Based on the conceptual plan and a memorandum of understanding executed earlier this year, the total anticipated cost for separation is roughly $39 million. SEPTA's project costs are estimated at $29 million while CSX's portion will total approximately $10 million. However, the agreement relies on each railroad obtaining funding for their portion of the project. In addition to the $155 million SEPTA is dedicating solely to PTC, SEPTA has also committed another $150 million to install Automatic Train Control (ATC) which provides the technical foundation on which its PTC system will operate. In meeting the PTC mandate and its aggressive timeline, SEPTA has diverted all of its available capital funds away from its most critical state of good repair projects, including bridge and substation rehabilitation work. SEPTA simply does not have any room in its budget to fund the separation plan at this time.

SEPTA has assured me that they are still on schedule to deploy PTC by the December 31, 2015 deadline, and I am pleased that SEPTA and CSX have developed an agreement that enables each railroad to meet their PTC obligations. If a funding source is not soon identified, however, neither railroad will realize the technical and operational efficiencies the plan provides. Moreover, as the tenant on this segment, the impact to SEPTA's operations will be disproportionately negative. This project will profoundly benefit passenger rail service in my district, as well as CSX's East Coast operations, and I would appreciate any assistance you can provide so that SEPTA and CSX can advance this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress