Thursday, August 18, AFPM President and CEO Chet Thompson sent a letter to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ranking Member Sam Graves (R-MO) making clear AFPM's support for a bipartisan -Surface Transportation Board (STB) reauthorization bill that provides the STB with the resources and authority it needs to quickly address rail service issues. Specifically, Thompson urged the Committee and Congress to prioritize the following in STB reauthorization:

1. **Enhance the STB's ability to address critical service issues**: In the last eighteen months, rail service delivery issues escalated to the point where they have caused facilities in critical industries to slow or temporarily cease operations and caused those same industries to seek costly shipping alternatives, thereby increasing costs to consumers. While the STB has emergency authority powers and has exercised these powers to provide some relief to rail shippers, the current authorities can be improved and strengthened. Congress should grant STB additional emergency authorities to quickly address service disruptions in critical industries such as refining and petrochemical manufacturing.
2. **Improve the data STB receives to better address rail problems:** Congress should require railroads to report meaningful data to STB on "first mile/last mile service" to improve performance tracking. Providing STB more transparent data, particularly in the first and last mile, could go a long way to identifying service issues early, and mitigating the impacts of those issues before they reach untenable levels. To facilitate better data exchange, Congress should also encourage the use of global positioning systems and other telemetry technology on freight rail cars to provide real-time rail data.
3. **Provide service standards:** Rail carriers are extremely averse to including service delivery standards in contracts, particularly for captive rail shippers. Such standards would improve service reliability and allow manufacturers and refiners to plan accordingly and avoid facility slowdowns or unexpected outages. Congress should clarify service obligations and hold railroads accountable to those standards.
4. **Recognize current state of rail car ownership**: Current law allows railroads to charge shippers fees (demurrage) when shippers are slow to load or unload rail cars. Rail car ownership has shifted such that rail customers now own approximately 75 percent of freight rail cars. Despite this shift in ownership and maintenance responsibility, rail car owners do not have the ability to charge fees when the railroads are slow to deliver or pick up cars. Congress should recognize that both shippers and railroads have a responsibility to keep rail cars moving and allow shippers who own or lease their own rail cars to assess a fee on railroads when railroads delay moving rail cars efficiently.
5. **Encourage STB to complete outstanding rulemakings:** Congress can help support STB by allocating additional resources to the STB to facilitate the expeditious completion of open rulemaking dockets. In addition, Congress should consider efforts to expedite the finalization of delayed rulemakings, specifically Reciprocal Switching (Docket EP 711), as this rule would reintroduce competition in the rail network and prevent future service issues.

Full letter can be found here.

The American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) is the leading trade association representing the makers of the fuels that keep us moving, the petrochemicals that are the essential building blocks for modern life, and the midstream companies that get our feedstocks and products where they need to go. We make the products that make life better, safer and more sustainable—we make progress.

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