

October 20, 2015

Dear House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Members:

The undersigned agricultural groups support the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015. We believe that multi-year surface transportation legislation providing adequate funding and greater certainty for transportation infrastructure projects is critical to the health of the agriculture industry. We strongly urge you to vote “yes” for this vital infrastructure legislation.

We believe that the strength of U.S. agriculture will benefit from the following provisions:

- National Highway Freight Policy: Sec. 1110 – A national highway freight policy with the express goal of strengthening U.S. economic competitiveness.
- Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects: Sec. 1111 – A program to provide funding for nationally or regionally significant projects that will: improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of freight and people; generate domestic economic benefits and U.S. global competitiveness; reduce highway congestion; improve connectivity between modes of freight transportation; and enhance the strength, durability, and serviceability of critical highway infrastructure.
- National Multimodal Freight Network: Sec. 70103 – A national multimodal freight network that will focus federal policy on the most strategic freight assets and assist in directing resources to improve multimodal freight network performance.
- Positive Train Control (PTC): Sec. 7014 – It is our understanding there will be an extension of the deadline for implementing positive train control. We believe that an extension will avoid the potential for adverse service disruptions on a broad range of agricultural commodity and product shipments, and other types of non-agricultural shipments.

Although we are supportive of the legislation as introduced, we request that Transportation and Infrastructure Committee members consider using the committee markup process as an opportunity to address the following areas:

- Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization/Rail Reform Legislation: – Including S. 808 in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015. We believe the incorporation of this piece of legislation is of the utmost importance.
- Financial Responsibility: - Prohibiting the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rulemaking to increase financial responsibility on for-hire motor carriers. We believe that this rulemaking will lead to higher truck rates and fewer for-hire motor carriers, with no demonstrable improvement in motor carrier safety.

- Port Performance Data: – Collecting data on key port performance metrics. Trade is critical to U.S. agriculture and when port disputes occur, it is consumers and industries including agriculture that bear the brunt of the damage. We believe that the collection of key port performance metrics, rather than a continued reliance on anecdotal reports of problems at ports, will mitigate the impacts of port disputes.
- Safe, Flexible, and Efficient (SAFE) Trucking Act: Including the SAFE Trucking Act. We believe that transportation efficiency will increase, without compromising safety, if states are allowed to set truck weight limits on their Interstate Highways at 91,000 pounds for trucks equipped with an additional [sixth] axle.
- Short Haul Graduated Driver Pilot Program: Adopting the Short Haul Graduated Driver Pilot program. The age requirement to obtain a state commercial driver’s license (CDL) and operate within state lines is 18 years in all 48 contiguous states. We believe the inclusion of Rep. Crawford’s pilot program to allow short hauls of 150 air miles or less across state boundaries would strike the appropriate balance of maintaining high motor carrier safety standards and promoting commerce.
- Endorsements: – Granting an exemption to a hazardous materials endorsement for custom harvesters and other operators of similar equipment. Current federal law makes it very difficult for farmers and custom harvesters to transport the amount of fuel necessary for a single day of field operations with today’s agricultural equipment. Class A CDL holders cannot haul more than 118 gallons of diesel fuel without a hazardous materials endorsement. We believe an exemption for custom harvesters and other operators of similar equipment would better reflect the needs of modern agriculture.
- Covered Farm Vehicles: – Confirming congressional intent regarding MAP-21 implementation. When petitioned on scope of exemptions that could be provided to the intrastate operation of “covered farm vehicles,” FMCSA interpreted the provisions of MAP-21 much more narrowly than Congress intended and stated that it may withhold federal funding if states try to provide needed flexibility and additional regulatory relief. We believe that legislative action is required to clarify that states may adopt standards that are more reasonable to farmers and farm employees operating farm trucks near the farm, without jeopardizing federal funding.
- Hours-of-Service Rule for Livestock and Poultry: – Removing the 30-minute break after eight hours-of-service requirement. We believe that permanently removing this rule will avoid unnecessary discomfort for livestock and poultry during transport.

We look forward to working with you in support of the aforementioned provisions, and urge you to vote “yes” on the Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015.

Sincerely,

Agribusiness Association of Iowa
Agribusiness Council of Indiana
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
California Grain & Feed Association
Corn Refiners Association
Far West Agribusiness Association
Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils
Iowa Institute for Cooperatives
Kansas Cooperative Council
Kansas Grain and Feed Association
Meat Import Council of America
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Bean Shippers
Minnesota Grain and Feed Association
Missouri Agribusiness Association
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Chicken Council
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Farmers Union
National Grain and Feed Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Pasta Association
National Pork Producers Council
National Potato Council
National Turkey Federation
Nebraska Grain and Feed Association
North American Meat Institute
North American Millers' Association
North Dakota Grain Dealers Association
Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Oklahoma Agribusiness Retailers Association
Oklahoma Agricultural Cooperative Council, Inc.
Oklahoma Grain and Feed Association
Pacific Northwest Grain & Feed Association
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association
South Dakota Grain & Feed Association
The Agriculture Transportation Coalition
The Fertilizer Institute

United States Hide, Skin and Leather Association
USA Rice
US Custom Harvesters
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association