

**Minnesota Senate  
Minnesota House  
Of Representatives**

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**Senator D. Scott Dibble**  
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**Representative Frank Hornstein**  
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September 24, 2014

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**Daniel R. Elliott III**  
Chairman, Surface Transportation Board  
395 E Street SW  
Washington, DC 20423

ENTERED  
Office of Proceedings  
October 10, 2014  
Part of  
Public Record

Dear Chairman Elliott,

We are writing to express our growing concern with regard to the effects of increased freight train traffic, particularly exacerbated by oil shipments, through Minnesota, and the displacement and de-prioritization of commuter and passenger rail traffic. In the wake of increased freight train traffic through Minnesota from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota, we are concerned not only about the safety of our constituents, but also the loss of economic development opportunity to the state.

Amtrak's Empire Builder route, running from Chicago to Seattle and Portland, has been forced to endure significant delays affecting ridership. Beginning in July 2013 with the U.S. Court of Appeals decision that ruled the metrics and standards to determine responsibility for train delays to be unconstitutional, on-time performance of the Empire Builder decreased dramatically, and the length of each delay skyrocketed. Amtrak estimates the average delay for the Empire Builder along its entire route is eight to ten hours. As of June 2014, Amtrak reported a 15 percent drop in ridership attributable to delays. Amtrak estimates its monthly losses to exceed \$1 million for the Empire Builder alone. Given that commercial air or bus service operating on the same route as the Empire Builder is inadequate, this route is vital to the transportation interests of our state and nation.

As chairs of the Senate and House Transportation committees, along with our legislative colleagues who represent communities surrounding Amtrak's Empire Builder route through Minnesota, we hope a solution can be reached to balance these competing interests. If the passenger rail delays continue, we believe this will not only have a detrimental effect on Amtrak—but also on the freight carriers themselves who may also find themselves delayed behind passenger trains running hours, if not days, behind schedule.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of D. Scott Dibble in blue ink.

Sen. D. Scott Dibble, District 61  
Chair, Senate Transportation Committee

Handwritten signature of Frank Hornstein in blue ink.

Rep. Frank Hornstein, District 61A  
Chair, House Transportation Finance Committee



Sen. Kari Dziedzic, District 60



Sen. Rod Skoe, District 2



Sen. John Hoffman, District 36



Rep. Alice Hausman, District 66A



Rep. Connie Bernardy, District 41A



Rep. Jerry Newton, District 37A



Rep. Jim Newberger, District 15B



Rep. Yvonne Selcer, District 48A



Rep. Carolyn Laine, District 41B



Rep. Mary Sawatzky, District 17B



Rep. Jim Abeler, District 35A



Sen. Alice Johnson, District 37



Sen. Sandra L. Pappas, District 65



Rep. Diane Loeffler, District 60A



Sen. Kent Eken, District 4

OFFICE OF CHAIRMAN

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