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FRA Administrator Szabo  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Railroad Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

February 23, 2011

Dear Administrator Szabo,

The American High Speed Rail Alliance is a not-for-profit association whose membership includes state departments of transportation, passenger rail corridors, financial organizations, the full spectrum of rail design, engineering, construction and supplier companies, rail labor unions and grassroots advocates.

The Alliance's mission is to advocate for the development and implementation of high speed rail in the United States.

I am writing to express concern over the direction of the RSAC High Speed Rail Engineering Task Force under the FRA in developing the next generation of standards. The goal of this task force is to create recommendations for engineering standards related to high speed rail vehicles that will operate up to 220 mph. On February 14 and 15, 2011 approximately 80 industry experts, including an AHSRA representative, participated in the second meeting in Washington, DC.

In accordance with our mission, the Alliance strongly supports a safe and reliable high speed rail system. It appears however, the FRA Office of Safety and their consultant may be moving back to the approach that developed the original Tier 1 and Tier 2 standards that focused solely on crash worthiness and not on crash avoidance. This could negatively impact high speed rail development and implementation in the United States and lead to heavier more expensive solutions that may not necessarily provide the overall safety benefits the FRA desires.

Over the past decade, high speed rail systems have been put into service throughout the world that emphasize a "systems based approach" to safety rather than individual aspects. As a result of last week's RSAC meeting, the rail industry has prepared a statement that is attached for your reference.

I encourage you to please consider these points as the process to develop the next generation standards continues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Ellen Curto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Ellen Curto  
Executive Director