

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 18, 2018

The Honorable Heath Hall  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Railroad Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Hall,

The recent derailment of the Amtrak *Cascades* train 501 near DuPont, Washington, on December 18, 2017 is a stark reminder of the significant investments needed to improve the safety and efficiency of our nation's rail system. Although the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation is ongoing, their preliminary report indicates that Positive Train Control (PTC) would have prevented this derailment.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of this tragic incident, it is clear that achieving nationwide implementation of PTC must be a top priority for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Recognizing that the current statutory deadline for PTC implementation is December 31, 2018, we write to request a comprehensive update on the status of PTC implementation and the steps FRA will take to ensure that all passenger and freight railroads meet this deadline.

Since 1969, the NTSB has investigated 148 accidents that were determined to be preventable by PTC. These accidents resulted in 298 fatalities and 6,763 injuries. Based on the NTSB's recommendations, Congress passed the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-432), which mandated implementation of PTC on all commuter and intercity passenger rail lines and Class I freight main lines transporting poison- or toxic-by-inhalation hazardous materials by December 31, 2015. However, in 2015 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report to Congress that found most railroads would not meet the 2015 deadline due to a variety of challenges including access to funding and difficulty integrating technologies. The report also stated that FRA's oversight efforts were "not sufficient to oversee progress made by individual railroads and to hold them accountable for making progress in meeting the mandated PTC deadline".<sup>2</sup>

Following the release of the GAO report, Congress passed the Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-73) which authorized a three year extension of the implementation deadline and mandated additional oversight by FRA, including the authority to assess civil penalties, to ensure that railroads make adequate progress toward full PTC implementation. With less than one year until the 2018 implementation deadline, it is imperative that FRA conduct vigorous oversight of the data provided by railroads and use all tools within FRA's authority to ensure that all railroads complete full PTC implementation by the deadline. It is also essential that FRA make available additional funding to implement this technology.

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<sup>1</sup> NTSB. PRELIMINARY REPORT Amtrak Passenger Train 501 Derailment DuPont, Washington December 18, 2017 [RRD18MR001](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 4, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> GAO, Positive Train Control: Additional Oversight Needed As Most Railroads Do Not Expect to Meet 2015 Implementation Deadline, [GAO-15-739](#) (Washington, D.C.: September, 2015).

Therefore, we respectfully request that you provide a comprehensive update on the current status of PTC implementation, an outline of the actions FRA will take over the next several months to ensure that full PTC implementation is achieved by December 31, 2018, and an estimate of the total funding necessary to meet this deadline.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

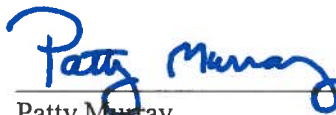
Sincerely,



Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress



Denny Heck  
Member of Congress



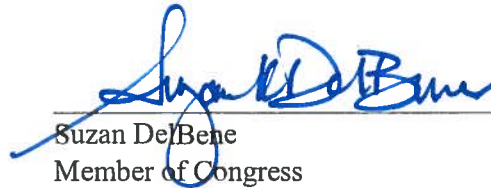
Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United State Senator



Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene  
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress