



**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**James L. Oberstar**  
Chairman

**John L. Mica**  
Ranking Republican Member

June 22, 2010

David Heysfeld, Chief of Staff  
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

The Honorable Ray LaHood  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I am writing to express my concerns about the Department's proposal to create an unnecessary federal bureaucracy to address transit safety issues across the country and also to share my proposal to make improvements to the current safety inspection system.

Today marks the one-year anniversary of the Washington Metro Red Line crash that killed nine people and injured 80. This tragedy focused attention on the safety of local rail transit systems around the country, and led the U.S. Department of Transportation to propose a new transit safety oversight regime that would be a federal, rather than state, responsibility.

Transit is the safest mode of transportation in the United States, and the safety record of rail transit – subways, Metro systems, light rail, and streetcars – is even better. There are 45 rail transit systems carrying more than 7 million people every day. The fatality rate for these systems is less than 1 death for every 66 million passengers carried. This rate is significantly lower than all other transportation modes.

There is no guarantee that making transit safety oversight a federal responsibility will improve safety. In fact, the Federal Railroad Administration already regulates the safety of commuter rail and Amtrak operations, yet both these modes have much higher fatality rates than rail transit.

The President's budget request for the Federal Transit Administration includes \$30 million for 260 new full-time equivalent safety positions, and this is only the first year of a three-year proposal to federalize transit safety oversight. But this new bureaucracy will not address the real safety needs of transit systems. What local transit agencies need is funding for safety improvements and upgraded train control systems, not federal bureaucrats walking their track and looking over their shoulders.

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While I agree that there are significant weaknesses in the current State Safety Oversight system for rail transit, I believe we must address those weaknesses and strengthen the system we have, rather than creating a new federal bureaucracy.

Since safety is our top priority, I believe we should ensure that federal funds get directly to State Safety Oversight agencies. Transit agencies should also be required to prioritize their existing formula grant funds for safety improvements and state of good repair. I believe the Department should develop safety standards for transit operating practices and equipment. These changes can be made within the current state-managed system without creating a huge new federal workforce.

I believe we can work together to improve safety for transit passengers without needlessly expanding the federal bureaucracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John L. Mica". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping loop that extends to the left and then curves back to the right, crossing over itself.

John L. Mica  
Ranking Republican Member  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure