



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of the Chairman

September 22, 2010

The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing in strong support of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's amendment to H.R. 4714, the "National Transportation Safety Board Reauthorization Act of 2010." The Committee's proposed amendment provides a level of funding and an authorized level of Full Time Equivalents (FTE) that will permit the NTSB to meet our critical mission of investigating transportation accidents.

Over the last several years, the NTSB has taken on increased responsibilities with fewer resources. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, we were able to accomplish the same number of products as we did in FY 2003 with 33 fewer FTE positions. While the Congress has demonstrated its support for the agency, we continue to be well short of our desired goal of 477 FTEs. Over the last decade, NTSB has seen a reduction in FTEs but an increase in significant regulatory requirements, such as the Federal government's computer security directives, General Services Administration contracting requirements, and statutory mandates for rail disaster assistance. Although these are important initiatives, it has affected our ability to hire investigators.

As you know, the President's budget would provide \$100.4 million for FY 2011 for the operations of the NTSB. If enacted, this level would still require the NTSB to eliminate 13 FTEs. While we believe we could absorb this through attrition, historically, we experience the greatest level of staffing turnover in our investigative offices. It should be noted that both the Senate and House subcommittees on appropriations have reacted to our needs by providing funding levels of \$104.3 million and \$104.23 million, respectively in their FY 2011 proposals.

The Committee's amendment, while generous, is still \$14.7 million less than the authorized levels included in H.R. 4714, as reported by the Committee. Nevertheless, the amendment sets the path for the agency to reach its desired goal of 477 FTEs. Any proposal that would reduce or freeze the NTSB's authorized levels below the current appropriations' proposals for FY2011 would severely jeopardize our ability to respond to the transportation accidents we are required to investigate by statute. Further reductions in authorized levels for the NTSB

would severely compromise the agency's ability to achieve its critical safety mission. Proposals to reduce the funding of the NTSB to the 2008 appropriated level would represent a \$13.6 million cut from the current FY2010 funding level. The agency would simply not be able to absorb this reduction through a hiring freeze, and we would be forced to engage in a Reduction In Force (RIF) of approximately 100 FTEs. Such a significant staff reduction would result in fewer accident investigations and fewer safety studies. Moreover, we would lose significant funding to upgrade our laboratory facilities. We are facing significant challenges as we try to keep pace with technological developments in the transportation industry. Such a loss would undercut our preeminence as the leading safety investigative body in the world.

I strongly support the Committee's amendment to H.R. 4714, as it makes a significant investment in improving our Nation's transportation safety. On behalf of our staff, I thank you for your continued support of the NTSB and our important mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hersman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah A.P. Hersman
Chairman