

**“As Delivered” Remarks of Ronald L. Batory, Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
Before the Association of State Rail Safety Managers
New York City, NY
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Thank you, Mike. I appreciate the warm welcome.

It is a true pleasure to speak before the Members and Guests of the Association of State Rail Safety Managers.

I have much respect for this annual meeting. It brings together a very unique talent pool of rail safety professionals.

Now let me share why I stand before you this morning and what I intend to convey. Naturally your Association, President, Mike Stead invited me to speak today but my appearing before you goes much deeper than that.

Prior to my retirement from the railroad industry last year I elected to pursue public service and in particular the Federal Railroad Administration. I was very fortunate to become its Administrator earlier this year. My objective was fueled by dual lifelong passions. Love of country and love for railroads.

So, all that said why am I here? It's to serve our country by contributing to the needs of the Federal Railroad Administration utilizing my 45+ years of rail industry experience garnered from the thousands of rail industry associated people such as yourselves that I've worked with throughout my passionate career. In essence it is from you, about you and for you as an American.

In recognition of our mutual interests towards railroads I want to share some facts and thoughts concerning three key areas. Those being safety, technology & infrastructure. Afterwards, assuming time allows I would welcome a conversation, as listening to you is of considerable value to my effort going forward.

Not surprising and definitely first is safety. It applies to everything we do.

- Safety is the foundation for success.
- Safety is uncompromising
- Safety is non-negotiable
- Safety is unforgiving
- Safety is personal
- Safety never sleeps

Many if not all of you can appreciate the statements just shared. We have walked each other's paths in promoting safety throughout our Nation's Rail Network.

I cannot emphasize enough that safety must be first and foremost in everything we develop, institute and practice. Therefore, reducing and eliminating risk is paramount to enhancing safety across the board.

With this in mind I want to talk about a very absorbing time and effort subject matter known as Positive Train Control, or PTC. Implementation of PTC systems is at the top of FRA's agenda and represents the most fundamental change in train control rail safety technology since the introduction of Automatic Train Control nearly century ago.

For those of you that might not know, PTC is a risk reduction system designed to prevent undesired train control movements such as....

- Train to train collisions
- Over speed
- Incursions into established work zones
- And trains from being routed to the wrong track because a switch was left in the wrong position.

In other words, PTC is designed to avert accidents caused by human error should the flaw be incurred. Our nearly quarter of million fellow Americans that maintain and operate our Nation's railroads are safe. The PTC technology tool in their toolbox will only strengthen the already safe environment in which they are employed.

Reducing and eliminating risk extends beyond railroad rights-of-way to the broader public as well. Earlier this year FRA once again partnered with fellow agency National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to roll out a multi-million-dollar public awareness safety campaign to educate the public about the railroad grade crossings.

Last Tuesday in Washington, D.C. The Department of Transportation recently hosted an all day Summit led by the Federal Railroad Administration and supported by partnering agencies regarding various railroad grade crossing and trespasser subject matters. This event has now set the stage for next steps starting in 2019 regarding engineering, education and enforcement.

The Department is both deliberate and persistent about getting this message out. Last year, 274 people died in grade-crossing accidents – the second annual increase since 2016.

This subject matter will always be close to my heart. During my career, I've personally experienced on board locomotive collisions with highway vehicles. In one instance, it was a school bus full of children – I could actually see them jumping out the back door and rushing down the front steps of the bus as our train approached. Thankfully, that school bus emptied seconds before the train struck.

My daughter Erin also lost a high school friend and classmate to a train-auto collision 20 years ago. Since my arrival at DOT headquarters, I've literally been jolted by the daily national incidents of deaths, injuries and near-misses reported.

On the day of my swearing in ceremony, I pledge that throughout my tenure as the FRA Administrator, increasing public awareness of rail safety will be a consistent priority of mine, not unlike my past involvement in the private sector.

I ask each of you to join me in this endeavor, if you are not already engaged. Because taken together, railroad crossing and trespasser fatalities have accounted for about 95 percent of all rail-related deaths over the past 10 years.

And since 1997, more people have died each year from trespassing than in motor vehicle collisions with trains at highway-rail grade crossings.

Congress is certainly paying attention. The U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, in its Fiscal Year 2018 Transportation Budget Report, instructed FRA to identify and study the fundamental factors that lead to trespassing incidents on railroad property.

In addition, we've also been instructed to develop a national strategy to prevent trespasser incidents – incorporating milestones and metrics to define success. FRA is hard at work on this strategy, which is scheduled to be completed this year.

Going forward, I believe safety and innovation must be coupled together. As mentioned, we're already doing this with PTC. But other transformative technologies await us as we continue pursuing our 21st century journey. Each day is an opportunity to embrace technology to reduce risks and have the railroad industry become a safer mode of transportation. Each of you along with those aside of you share in this unique opportunity and I encourage all of you to lead it.

What you do today will determine tomorrow's future. Aggressively embracing the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and autonomous functions that can foster an environment toward minimal to non-existent risk. It is a must if we intend to make a positive difference in safety.

As it pertains to transformative technologies, drones – to use one example – are already demonstrating their value. Drone technology is revolutionizing many industries as companies are increasingly interested in adapting them for all kinds of commercial and humanitarian applications.

In the rail industry, drones have a role to play in safeguarding infrastructure and investigating accidents or preventing them. There are other technologies also emerging successfully, which will ultimately reduce risk and enhance safety among the engineering, mechanical and operating disciplines.

So now imagine our safety-instilled culture of zero tolerance combined with the infinite use of developing technology. This combination of culture and applied sciences can be the key ingredients for determining and developing safe, smart and sustainable infrastructure for our future.

How much one builds or spends on infrastructure is not nearly as important as to how wisely we exercise those actions. We have many fields of opportunity awaiting us to harvest change whether it be safety, technology, infrastructure or a combination thereof.

Some of you know that I'm not a "caretaker". Instead I've always sought to be a "change agent" and encourage constructive change. You cannot fear failure. If you do, it becomes a lock on the door that keeps you from entering the unknown side of creative innovation.

So, with that said, as we embark on the first half of the 21st century technology needs to be aggressively exploited. Developing and instituting methods to lower risk among operating and maintenance practices can take us to new levels of improved safety, thus enhancing capacity and efficiency with less variability to accommodate safe growth.

Applying prescriptive rulemaking to technology will inhibit safety oriented innovation. In essence technology can move faster than ink can dry and technological advancements will not wait for that ink to be applied and ultimately dry.

Minimum/maximum prescriptive rule making exists today with a long tail of history.

Augmenting that with performance based rule measurements has considerable upside benefit. The combination if properly balanced can further reduce risk and improve safety.

As your Administrator, I will well and faithfully discharge its duties with unrelenting vigor. I look forward every day to using all the rail safety and business knowledge that thousands of Americans such as yourselves, have given me throughout my living dream.

Combining my commitment and knowledge with that which already exists today at FRA, I'm of the belief we can make a positive difference for the future to tell.

Thank You Very Much And God Bless The United States of America.

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