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Federal Railroad Administration Announces Climate Challenge to Meet Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050

Washington, D.C. – This Earth Day, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced its rail industry Climate Challenge. The agency is asking owners and operators along the national rail network, and manufacturers of rail equipment, to join FRA’s commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in the rail industry and rail transportation by 2050. Achieving this target will contribute to FRA’s key goals of building a safe, efficient, and modern transportation system that will expand economic opportunities, create cleaner and safer communities, and help avert the worst effects of climate change. Simultaneously, FRA’s Climate Challenge will promote the country’s global leadership in innovation and climate protection.

“FRA commits to supporting innovation in the rail industry to keep rail one of the most sustainable transportation choices,” said FRA Administrator Amit Bose. “Together, we will expand access to passenger and freight rail, ensure that they are powered by environmentally-friendly technologies, and eliminate emissions across the rail supply chain.”

Freight rail is up to 75% more efficient than truck transportation, while passenger rail is up to 46% more efficient than driving and 34% more efficient than flying. FRA’s Climate Challenge builds on the strengths of rail transportation by encouraging the rail industry to decarbonize their operations, which will ensure that rail continues to be a model of sustainability and resiliency well into the future. FRA will highlight those companies that meet or beat its challenge and support the reduction of transportation emissions by expanding access to rail transport and partnering with the rail industry in the research and development of renewable energy sources.

In order to leverage every opportunity to combat climate change, FRA is also announcing its partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) SmartWay program. SmartWay emphasizes supply chain sustainability by helping freight transportation companies measure, benchmark, and improve their energy efficiency. As the regulator of over 140,000 freight route miles – the largest freight rail network

in the world – FRA is proud to embrace solutions to the climate crisis alongside its partners and stakeholders.

Over the past two decades, FRA has worked extensively with its industry partners to research and develop clean energy sources for rail transportation. These continuing efforts will provide the rail industry with multiple avenues to offset or eliminate climate-changing emissions by 2050. For example, FRA has previously partnered with Amtrak to develop biodiesel fuels for locomotives and has funded programs dedicated to battery and electrification technologies. The agency is also conducting ongoing research on the feasibility of hydrogen fuel cells as alternatives to diesel use.

President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law further advances FRA and the rail industry’s ability to meet ambitious climate goals through funding projects that can reduce transportation and rail GHG emissions. The legislation is a 500% increase over recent funding levels for rail. Much of this funding will be dedicated to expanding passenger rail access and improving the freight rail network through FRA’s competitive discretionary grant programs, enabling modal shift away from less energy efficient modes of travel.

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