

**Written Statement of Amit Bose, Administrator
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**Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
U.S. House of Representatives**

**“Oversight and Examination of Railroad Grade
Crossing Elimination and Safety”
January 18, 2024**

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Payne, and members of the subcommittee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your support for improving safety at highway-rail grade crossings.

Safety is core to the mission of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). We accomplish that mission with the work of our safety professionals, partnerships with stakeholders, and investments in projects.

Safety professionals cover every discipline of railroad operations and represent a majority of FRA’s workforce. For example, across the United States, FRA grade crossing safety inspectors inspect grade crossings; perform critical outreach work to educate the public; and work with railroads, state departments of transportation, and communities to ensure compliance with FRA safety regulations. As part of its commitment to safety, FRA has nearly doubled its Grade Crossing and Trespasser Outreach Division to 48 staff in the past two years.

FRA partners with railroads, States, and local government to promote grade crossing safety. That work is data driven. For example, when communities in Birmingham, AL; Hammond, IN; and Houston, TX reported high numbers of blocked crossings to FRA’s Public Blocked Crossing Incident Reporter, FRA engaged with those cities to show that a combination of technology, changes to railroad operations, and public outreach to pedestrians and drivers can reduce the impacts of blocked crossings. FRA ensures that railroads comply with safety regulations, enforce their own operating rules, and take seriously their responsibility to local communities. In addition, FRA partners with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and others to ensure the safety of people and goods at our Nation’s highway-rail grade crossings.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) presents an historic opportunity for the Biden-Harris Administration to invest in rail safety and mobility projects to better the lives of Americans who live near or travel along America’s rail lines. Congress demonstrated its commitment to grade crossing safety and bolstering our nation’s rail network when it passed the BIL, creating several new rail investment

programs and reauthorizing others. In particular, the Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Grant Program provides funding to enhance the health and safety of communities, eliminate highway-rail and pathway-rail grade crossings that are frequently blocked by trains, reduce the impacts that freight movement and railroad operations may have on communities, and improve the mobility of people and goods. Additionally, highway-rail crossing improvement projects are eligible for funding under the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant Program.

This funding answers a real need. In 2022, there were more than 2,200 highway-rail crossing collisions in the United States. FRA received 30,749 blocked crossing reports submitted to FRA's public complaint portal identifying 22,473 blocked highway-rail grade crossing events. In 2022, the top 5 states by number of blocked crossing reports submitted were in order: Texas with 6,508 (21%), Ohio 3,575 (12%); Illinois 2,952 (10%); Indiana 2,533 (8%); and Tennessee 1,483 (5%).

Unsurprisingly, the BIL rail programs to date have received widespread demand. For example, FRA released the first RCE Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) in June 2022, and it was oversubscribed more than 4 to 1, with 153 eligible applications submitted from 41 States, requesting more than \$2.3 billion in funds. FRA has invested in regionally focused outreach teams to provide grant-related technical assistance to potential applicants to help meet this demand efficiently when we make available future BIL funds provided under Advance Appropriations and funded under the annual authorization amounts.

In June 2023, FRA announced the first selections under the RCE Grant Program with 63 projects in 32 States receiving more than \$570 million. These awards address more than 400 at-grade crossings nationwide, improve safety, eliminate grade crossings through grade separations and closures, improve existing at-grade crossings, and enhance mobility of people and goods, benefiting railroads and communities.

For example, FRA awarded the West Belt Improvement Project in the City of Houston. Houston's East End is one of many communities across the country that FRA has worked closely with to address grade crossing safety. I personally visited Houston in August 2022 to launch a focused grade crossing inspection and returned six months later to share the outcomes. FRA, Union Pacific Railroad, BNSF Railway, and the City of Houston partnered to identify crossings, for which the railroads issued strict orders to avoid blocking, resulting in nearly a 40% reduction in reports of blocked crossings in Houston. In June 2023, I announced the award of an RCE grant to the City of Houston to construct four underpasses and close four at-grade crossings to eliminate seven existing at-grade crossings.

Other cities are pursuing comprehensive grade crossing safety efforts. The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program serves as an example of a public-private partnership in Chicago; it includes 25 new roadway overpasses or underpasses and six new rail overpasses or underpasses. Additionally, FRA and the U.S. Department of Transportation have awarded nearly \$45 million in Florida to Brightline Trains, LLC; Florida Department of Transportation; Broward MPO; and cities along the route for projects specifically related to trespassers and grade crossing safety.

The dedicated funding of the RCE Grant Program and the other programs under the BIL is one of many ways President Biden's Investing in America agenda will make a difference in people's daily lives by improving safety and convenience and creating good-paying jobs to rebuild our Nation's infrastructure.

Thank you again for having me here today and for your continued support. I look forward to answering your questions.