



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Bill Shuster
Chairman

Nick J. Rahall, III
Ranking Member

Christopher P. Bertram, Staff Director

James H. Zoia, Democrat Staff Director

October 11, 2013

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

Although I am encouraged by recent discussions between the White House and House Republicans on resolving the debt limit, I am deeply troubled by House Republicans' apparent unwillingness to end the Federal Government shutdown. The Government shutdown is having a debilitating effect on transportation and infrastructure programs – particularly the safety of our Nation's transportation and infrastructure systems – that impact the daily lives of our citizens. Therefore, as Ranking Member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I urge you to end the Federal Government shutdown today – allow a simple up-or-down vote on the Senate-passed bill to continue funding for the Federal Government (H.J. Res. 59).

The Government shutdown is clearly eroding the margin of safety for aviation. As a result of the shutdown, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has furloughed almost 15,000 employees, including over one-half of its inspectors who review airline operations and aircraft manufacturing facilities – approximately 1,700 safety inspectors. The FAA is also operating under maintenance restrictions that prevent technicians from fully addressing aviation equipment and system issues, which slows equipment repairs and reduces redundancy at many airports across the country.

In addition, the FAA staff that certifies the safety of aircraft and component parts has been reduced from approximately 1,300 to 100 employees because of the Government shutdown. Without these FAA staff, manufacturers cannot get aircraft and components certified and, thus, airlines are unable to deploy these new aircraft.

The shutdown of these functions also threatens a critical sector important to the Nation's continued economic recovery. The manufacture of civilian aircraft and related components directly provides more than one million jobs that produced \$185 billion in economic output in 2009, and U.S. sales of civilian aircraft, engines, and equipment to foreign entities contributed \$75 billion toward the Nation's trade balance that year. The Government shutdown directly threatens this sector as manufacturers' schedules across the country are delayed and industry stakeholders are expected to begin laying off employees if the shutdown continues.

Similarly, because of the Government shutdown, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has furloughed 333 employees and suspended all vehicle safety activities. Vehicle defect investigations have stopped and recall information from consumers and manufacturers cannot be used to identify safety problems and save lives.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has been forced to furlough 95 percent of its staff, bringing the Federal transit program to a halt. Because of the shutdown, FTA's 2,200 grantees cannot receive new grants or even draw down on existing Federal funds. With all Federal investment in public transit capital and operating grants halted, local public transit agencies are finding it difficult to continue critical work to improve transit safety and operations. Given that small, rural transit agencies are more dependent on FTA grants to operate their systems, the public transit effects of the shutdown are likely to impact rural America first.

Furthermore, because of the Government shutdown, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is not carrying out inspections, safety reviews, or routine maintenance of dam, levee, and navigation lock structures. Given that much of the Corps of Engineers' inventory of water resources infrastructure is aging, and often performing well beyond its expected service life, the lack of routine maintenance and inspections increases the likelihood of infrastructure failure. The Government is also unable to address ongoing threats to public health from exposure to toxic chemicals of abandoned Superfund waste sites. As a result of the Government shutdown, cleanup work on many of the 800 contaminated Superfund sites has slowed or halted altogether. For instance, Superfund cleanup work has slowed or halted in the town of Lockport, New York, near Niagara Falls, where the agency was ready to relocate homeowners because of PCB, lead, and other contaminants along Eighteen Mile Creek; and Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where residents were expecting cleanup to begin on a former electro-plating and metal processing facility, which had polluted nearby well water.

In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard has been forced to suspend inspections and repairs. It has also reduced surface and air support, which compromises Coast Guard readiness and U.S. maritime security. Specifically, the Coast Guard has been forced to suspend or curtail:

- foreign port anti-terrorism assessments in at least 12 countries;
- surface and air support to Joint Interagency Task Force-South, which detects, monitors, and interdicts illicit trafficking and other narco-terrorist threats;
- surface and air support to Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations, which detects and monitors migrant smuggling vessels; and
- seamen documentation and licensing.

Moreover, each of these Departments and agencies has been forced to halt work on ongoing transportation and infrastructure safety rulemakings. For instance, the U.S. Department of Transportation has been forced to cease work on aviation, highway, rail, and pipeline safety rulemakings, including rules regarding pilot training, motor coach safety, child safety, improvements to highway-rail grade crossings, the installation of automatic shut-off valves on pipelines, improvements to the integrity of oil and gas transmission pipelines, and the installation of leak detection technologies.

Finally, when transportation accidents do occur, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is extremely limited in its ability to investigate the causes of such accidents and make recommendations to ensure transportation safety. The NTSB has been forced to furlough more than 93 percent of its staff and has not initiated investigations of several transportation accidents that have occurred since the shutdown began 11 days ago, including:

- a fatal collision in Dandridge, Tennessee, among an over-the-road bus, a tractor-trailer, and a sport utility vehicle (8 fatalities; 13 injuries) (October 2, 2013); and
- two pipeline accidents, including a Rosston, Oklahoma natural gas pipeline explosion and a Tioga, North Dakota oil pipeline incident that spilled more than 865,000 gallons of crude oil – the largest oil spill in North Dakota history – just yesterday (October 10, 2013).

The NTSB has also suspended several major ongoing accident investigations because of the shutdown, including the investigations of the Asiana Airlines Flight 214 fatal crash in San Francisco, California, that killed three and injured 181 people; the United Parcel Service Flight 1354 fatal crash in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed two people; the Cessna Citation fatal crash in Santa Monica, California, that killed four people; and a collision of two Chicago Transit Authority trains that occurred on September 30, the day before the shutdown began.

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Mr. Speaker, I am deeply troubled by the debilitating effect of the Government shutdown on transportation and infrastructure safety and I urge you to end the Federal Government shutdown today.

Thank you for your consideration.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,



NICK J. RAHALL, II
Ranking Democratic Member

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader,
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Bill Shuster, Chairman,
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Democratic Members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure