

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
OF
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DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC BELT RAILROAD CORPORATION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
FIELD HEARING
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
HOW SMALL BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM SMART RAIL SHIPPING REGULATION
NOVEMBER 16, 2018**

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. My name is Ailsa “Elsa” von Dobeneck and I serve as the Director of External Affairs for the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad (NOPB). Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the benefits of rail to the local, state, and national economies. I would also like to thank you for your leadership and for your efforts to advance rail safety standards, while ensuring competition and growth.

New Orleans Public Belt Railroad has served a vital role in the region’s transportation network for over 110 years. By railcar volume, New Orleans is the nation’s 4th largest rail Gateway. NOPB is a Class III switching railroad with the primary mission of serving the Port of New Orleans and local industries. We are a neutral carrier, with 26 miles of mainline track and direct connections to six (6) Class I Railroads. Our Class 1 partners have a combined 132,000 plus mile network of track, which tie the port community and local industries directly to every major North American market. These direct connections give shippers in New Orleans and surrounding areas the benefit of more competitive rates, faster transit times, and distribution to multiple markets. In February of this year, NOPB transitioned from City of New Orleans to Port of New Orleans leadership. This synergy provides unparalleled opportunities for growth with a shared vision.

I would also like to thank the committee for its support of the shortline rail industry and your understanding of the positive impact we bring to the local economy. One of every four rail cars moving on the national network is handled by a short line, providing the first and last mile for a wide variety of goods from energy products, to industrial products, to finished consumer goods. Our services provide the opportunity for local shippers to have efficient and cost effective access to the national rail network. At NOPB we are a team of 175 strong, working together to ensure freight is moved efficiently and safely across the city. We live here, work here, and are dedicated to the success of New Orleans businesses.

As NOPB continues to grow, safety remains our number one priority. The rail industry has an impressive safety record, with 99.997% of hazmat carloads moved without a release caused by an incident and we are dedicated to becoming even safer. This impressive record is the result of significant technological investments and implementation of operations standards across the industry. Rail's safety record makes it a good choice for moving the hazardous materials vital to our everyday lives. In fact, the federal government requires railroads to carry hazardous materials under our common carrier obligation. We must accept, move, and handle hazmat cars by law.

It is our understanding that the Association of American Railroads and members of the shipping industry (including the American Chemistry Council, Fertilizer Institute, and Chlorine Trade Association) have found common ground and agreed upon an appropriate phase-out time period for older TIH tank cars. We are enthusiastic about this spirit of collaboration and are confident the plan will increase rail safety standards while ensuring the commodities vital to our everyday lives are accessible. We look forward to a potential Notice of Proposed Rulemaking by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and support balanced and safety-oriented progress.

As NOPB is an urban railroad, we have also adopted special operating practices for hazmat transport that meet and exceed regulatory requirements to help ensure these sensitive commodities are shipped safely and securely. These protocols were recently reviewed and expanded to cover all trains carrying a single carload of certain hazmat or 20 carloads of any combination of hazmat, such as crude oil and ethanol. These protocols include: a low speed restriction across our entire network, inspections multiple times a week, and increased education programs with emergency responders. We are as dedicated to being safe and reliable neighbors, as we are to being a safe and reliable transportation option.

Thank you for your time and for your dedication to small business, shortline rail, and safety. I am happy to address any questions you may have.