

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 21, 2017

President Hamberger
Association of American Railroads
425 3rd St SW #1000
Washington, DC 20024

Dear President Hamberger:

In light of the tragic Amtrak derailment in Washington this week that left at least three people dead and about 100 others injured, we write to ask the American Association of Railroads (AAR) to provide the Illinois congressional delegation with an update on the ongoing efforts of its member freight railroads to implement positive train control (PTC) safety technology in Illinois by the 2018 statutory deadline.

While the official cause of this week's Amtrak's crash is still being investigated, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has confirmed that the train was traveling at a speed more than double the posted limit before it derailed. Given that the train's excessive speed likely played a role in its derailment, it's possible that the fatal rail accident could have been avoided had PTC been in operation along those tracks. PTC is a congressionally mandated safety system that uses technology to slow or stop speeding trains, preventing collisions and overriding human errors. Amtrak's CEO confirmed that while PTC was installed on the rail segment where the crash occurred, it was still being tested and not yet operational.

PTC would have prevented multiple derailments on both freight and passenger railroads in the years since Congress mandated its implementation in 2008. Because the majority of passenger rail trips in Illinois and around the county operate on tracks owned by the freight railroads, implementing PTC on our nation's freight tracks is vitally important to the safety of the millions of passengers that use Amtrak and Metra each year in Illinois as well as the neighborhoods across Illinois that freight trains travel through every day. However, we understand the high costs and technological challenges that railroads have faced in developing and deploying this new technology. It's estimated that freight railroads will spend between \$9-10 billion by the time PTC is fully implemented nationwide, and in Illinois, interoperability and coordination challenges exist between the multiple freight railroads, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Amtrak, and Metra that each operate on or own track in the state.

Despite those challenges, implementing PTC will save lives, and this week's fatal Amtrak crash underscores why more must be done by the freight railroads to ensure PTC is installed and operating by the upcoming deadline. In the meantime, we request that you report back to the Illinois congressional delegation on AAR member railroads' current progress on implementing PTC in Illinois, the costs and challenges associated with implementation, and their timelines for PTC installation and operation on all Illinois routes.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator