

**Introductory Remarks Prepared For
Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
Before the 44th Meeting of the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee
Friday, May 20, 2011
Crowne Plaza Washington National Airport
Arlington, VA**

Thank you Bob (Lauby) – I'm very happy to join you at this, the 44th meeting of the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee.

As a body, you the members of RSAC have much to be proud of. And our industry is without question, better off as a result of the hard work you do.

While we come to the table with different points of view, the stakeholders represented here are greater than the sum of whole.

It is through this collaborative partnership that we come to understand one another's concerns; find points of agreement; and reach consensus.

This has been an incredibly challenging time for everyone, with ever-increasing demands, and in some cases, fewer resources reflecting the national economy.

America's railroads have played a vitally important role in America's prosperity.

And now, as we look upon the future, railroads are poised to once again transform the movement of people and goods.

Our mission may have expanded with President's Vision for High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail, but FRA continues to make safety its highest priority.

Let's take a moment to reflect on the current state of railroad safety. As you know, over the last two decades the record has been one of near continuous improvement.

However, railroading continues to be a hazardous occupation, as is evidenced by the unacceptable frequency of deaths and injuries we continue to witness.

The RSAC has proven itself capable of changing with the times, and we simply can't rest on our laurels.

The introduction of a new generation of railroad workers provides the opportunity to implement industry-wide practices that will reduce the number of accidents even as the industry is poised to play an even larger role in the nation's transportation future.

Statistical data indicates existing safety assurance programs have worked well. But to increase our effectiveness new strategies must be embraced.

Building strong safety cultures can more easily be accomplished through the establishment of voluntary risk mitigation programs, with realistic benchmarks and constructive corrective behavior over punitive discipline.

To be clear, both railroads and labor have to define boundaries since rules compliance is at the heart of safety.

Now, before I address you on the tasks before us today, let me update you on a subject that will occupy our time in the weeks, months and years to come.

On May 9, Secretary LaHood announced that 15 states and Amtrak are the recipients of \$2 billion under the latest round of High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program funds.

We are very excited about the progress that has been made to date and we look forward to the continuing development of this component of our long-term, national transportation system.

Successful high-speed corridors will not only leave a legacy for generations to come, but deliver tangible, economic benefits.

Safety remains a cornerstone of this effort, requiring that engineering and investment be linked to operational discipline and system safety planning.

I appreciate the willingness of so many of you to join the Passenger Safety Engineering Task Force and I congratulate the group in helping FRA evaluate the full range of equipment available to meet the needs of emerging high-speed rail.

On the funding front, to date, we remain well ahead of schedule in obligating our HSR funds, with more than \$5.8 billion obligated.

We are not only ahead of schedule, but will likely complete obligation of the Recovery Act funding nearly one-year ahead of the September 30, 2012 statutory deadline.

Thirty-three (33) states across the U.S. (and the District of Columbia) are currently laying the foundation for passenger rail corridors to link Americans with faster and more energy-efficient travel options.

States continue to clamor to be part of the national high-speed rail program.

Future population growth dictates that we act responsibly to address the looming capacity crunch, rising energy consumption and costs, environmental needs, and making communities livable.

Just like previous national scale investments to maintain our roads, bridges, and transit systems, we must strategically invest in our railways to ensure the safest, fastest and most efficient ways to move people and goods.

And to help freight rail assume an even greater role in America's life, we are making key investments through the Department's TIGER Program.

Rail will no longer be the forgotten mode. Americans' awareness of the need for transportation alternatives is acute, as gas prices continue to rise.

One of the reasons I wanted to be here this morning is to highlight an important new task that affects us all.

As most of you already know, the issue of distracted driving is a key focus for Secretary Ray LaHood.

The Secretary has hosted distracted driving summits across the nation, bringing together stakeholders from every corner of society to address the subject.

In our own industry the hazards of distracting electronic devices has been made abundantly and, at times, tragically clear.

Despite the increased attention the problem is receiving, the use of personal electronic devices still continues to be problematic.

We believe there is more that can, and must be done to make this practice socially unacceptable both in the workplace, and outside it.

In the rail industry, I believe the best approach for combating this problem is through peer-to-peer coaching.

The fact is, railroad managers and FRA inspectors can't be everywhere, so grass roots action by the rank and file is the only way to effectively police unsafe behaviors.

While the temptation is to focus on train and engine employees, the reality is that yardmen, dispatchers, signal maintainers, roadway workers, shuttle drivers, rail supervisors and those in the mechanical shops are all at risk.

We had a good turnout at our Electronic Device Distraction Summit last month and I am encouraged that interest is high. I invite you to participate in open discussions that will craft tools and programs to eliminate distracted behavior in our industry.

Just as public awareness and behavior have been positively influenced by campaigns to promote seat belt usage, and prevent drunk driving and recreational boating, so too can we teach and convince our families, friends and coworkers that using electronic devices carries with it inherent dangers and responsibility.

Similarly, stigmatizing substance abuse helped transform the railroad industry from a position of passive acceptance to one of zero tolerance.

Operation Redblock has been wildly successful in all but eliminating alcohol and illicit drug use. It has taught us that coworkers are uniquely positioned to influence their peers who engage in unsafe behaviors.

Moving forward together, by developing an industry-wide peer-to-peer program, can change people's attitudes about appropriate electronic device usages.

I ask you to accept the challenge of the task to be put before you today and to send your best to participate from all departments and crafts.

More generally, I want you to know that we have watched with appreciation as RSAC working groups have continued to deliver important recommendations.

Since the last full RSAC meeting in December, we've seen;

- The Locomotive Standards Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that was published in January.
- The Passenger Hours of Service NPRM was published in March.
- And the Concrete Crossties final rule that was published in April.

As a team, we need to build on these successes and continue the hard work needed to tackle the Dark Territory, Medical Standards, and Critical Incident tasks with the same spirit of cooperation for the vested interest of the safety.

I know that each and every one of you is committed to ensuring safety on the railroad-- for the rail workforce, for railroad passengers, and the communities that they operate in.

So thank you again for taking time to serve.

Let me close with this thought.

My job provides me with a unique perspective from which to see the industry function. I've been fortunate to get to know people throughout industry, and learn from them. What I have observed is that we have much more in common than not.

For anyone, it takes courage to push yourself to places that you have never been before, to test your limits, to break through barriers. Courage is sticking your neck out for something you believe in. It's an action, not a thought. And the sum of our actions is what we call progress.

I think we are entering another time of testing for the rail industry. From what I've seen, I'm confident that together we will be successful. But it will take courage.

Thank you.