

Date: March 25, 2021

To: Minnesota House Transportation Finance & Policy Committee

From: Citizens Acting for Rail Safety – Twin Cities

Re: Hazardous Substances Transportation Safety Act (MB 052-1)

Thank you for the opportunity to share support for the **Hazardous Substances Transportation Safety Act**. Citizens Acting for Rail Safety -Twin Cities is a knowledgeable regional grassroots, all-volunteer group of over 200 members.

On 1/15/2017 the Minnesota Department of Public Safety issued a report entitled Minnesota's Preparedness for Ethanol and Oil Transportation Incidents. Many of the issues identified in that report remain unresolved. Recommendations offered in this 126 page report identify numerous opportunities to improve preparedness for rail-related emergencies involving hazardous materials. Four key opportunities are addressed in the **Hazardous Substances Transportation Safety Act** that is before you:

- **Community Emergency Response:** As railroads are exempt from the Community Right-to-Know Act disclosures, there is need to improve the awareness of communities throughout Minnesota to the hazards posed by the freight rail transport of large volumes of flammable materials such as crude oil and ethanol, as well as air toxics such as chlorine and anhydrous ammonia. Families and leaders of institutions and businesses need to be informed as to what actions need to be taken, in the event of a local emergency – as well as to plan for evacuations and shelter in place operations. Notification systems and interoperable emergency communications systems also need to be assessed and updated or upgraded, as needed. In 2017 over 350,000 Minnesotans lived near rail lines. Population growth and increased residential development of multi-unit housing in proximity to freight rails and rail yards is a risk factor. Community-specific planning activities position stakeholders to appropriately respond in the case of a high-hazard rail incident.
- **Rail Safety Inspection Program:** the 4,500 miles of freight rail lines in Minnesota present a challenge - the complexity of a modern freight rail system, with multiple ownerships, differing equipment and operational capabilities and management systems demands sufficient expertise and coverage. The proposed increase in inspector and administrative support is necessary to meet the current and growing demand. The Rail Safety Inspection Program is critical to preventing high-hazard rail incidents in Minnesota.
- **Hazardous Substance Transportation Incident Response Preparedness:** Our State Emergency Response Teams are comprised of valuable resources from Minnesota fire departments, law enforcement agencies and other government entities. Across the state, Minnesota aims to have 11 Chemical Assessment Teams (CATs), four of which are also Emergency Response Teams. The teams can help prevent a hazardous release, mitigate a release, and stabilize an incident. They deploy with trained emergency responders, specialized equipment and support other state agencies. The CATs are composed of specialists and Minnesota, like other states, has had a difficult time in securing and retaining hazardous-material fire professionals in the last few years. Funding for hazardous-substance transport emergency response preparedness and planning activities will serve to bolster lagging staffing and ensure the emergency response teams are available to meet the critical tasking workload based on community risk factors.
- **Grade Crossings:** The MnDOT Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicles Operations Rail Administration Section monitors the safety performance of more than 4,000 rail-grade crossings along Minnesota's public road system and develops the department's Railroad Highway Grade Crossing Safety Improvement Program. Injuries and fatalities at rail-grade crossings are preventable. Please support this important work and advance the grade crossing safety account as put forth in the **Hazardous Substances Transportation Safety Act.**