October 5, 2015

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster:

On behalf of The U.S. Conference of Mayors, I wanted to express our support for your bill, H.R. 3651, the “Positive Train Control Enforcement and Implementation Act of 2015.”

As you know, under the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, railroads are required to implement Positive Train Control (PTC) by December 31, 2015 on railroad lines that ship toxic inhalation hazard (TIH) chemicals and on passenger rail. TIH chemicals include chlorine, anhydrous ammonia, ethylene oxide and hydrogen fluoride. TIH products are essential for local government efforts to ensure that drinking water and wastewater treatment is effective and protects public health.

TIH materials are essential to the economy and public health. We are very concerned that railroads will attempt to refuse shipments of these products such as chlorine that is used to protect public safety in drinking water and for disinfecting wastewater. Public water utilities rely on chlorination in combination with other treatment methods to eliminate public health threats from biological agents. The lack of chlorine will surely increase the risk of increased illness and mortality from infectious agents.

In addition, if the rails refuse to ship these chemicals, the only other viable alternative is to use trucks for transport, which is inherently more dangerous due to the potential accidents and potential releases into our communities.
The earliest workable implementation of PTC is desired. However, given that PTC will not be fully implemented and tested, and railroad employees will not be fully trained by the end of the year, we urge every member of Congress to support your legislation.

If you have any questions, please contact my staff, Judy Sheahan (202-861-6775 jsheahan@usmayors.org) or Kevin McCarty (202-861-6728 kmccarty@usmayors.org). Thank you again for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Tom Cochran
CEO and Executive Director