

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

Full Committee Nomination Hearing
Tuesday, May 13, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

COVER PAGE
David Fink

SENATOR JOHN THUNE (R-SD)

1. South Dakota relies on short line railroads to transport agricultural products and other goods to market. Do you agree short line railroads are critical to our nation's freight corridors, and if confirmed, how will you ensure short line railroads can continue to provide the crucial services that benefit the national transportation system?

Answer: Yes. Short lines are the arms and the legs of the freight rail system, and they play a critical role in moving freight across our rail network. I am familiar with the CRISI program from my time with Pan Am Railways. It is a great tool that Congress has given FRA to support short line railroads.

2. Unfortunately, transportation infrastructure investments – especially in rural areas – have been curtailed by burdensome regulatory requirements put in place over the past four years. Short line freight railroads in South Dakota and across the country are critical to moving goods and services in domestic and global markets. Burdensome regulatory requirements slow their ability to operate efficiently. How will you work to ensure that the FRA prioritizes reducing regulatory and administrative burdens?

Answer: Safety is my number one priority. If confirmed, I also look forward to streamlining and refreshing our regulatory regime. It's important that we maintain rigorous safety standards, while supporting short line rail growth and efficiency.

SENATOR JERRY MORAN (R-KS)

1. The CRISI Program is an incredibly important tool for improving rail infrastructure, particularly for short line railroads that still face the burden of past deferred maintenance. The CRISI Program also funds locomotive projects that “significantly reduce emissions.” FRA has awarded several innovative projects that upgrade locomotives to use newer diesel engines or to run on battery power. Since so many small and rural customers can only be served by four-axle locomotives and there is a finite supply of four-axle switchers, these projects are an important tool for railroads to upgrade and extend the life of their four-axle fleets.

If confirmed, will you commit to reviewing locomotive CRISI awards – now currently under review by the FRA – based on the merit of the business decisions involved and without regard to any outside pressures to consider the chosen technology favorably or unfavorably?

Answer: If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about these projects and working with you and your team. I agree that it is important that short lines have the tools to maintain safety, implement technology, and grow business.

SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN (R-AK)

As a former railroad executive, no doubt you are aware of rail safety projects being needlessly delayed due to required sign-offs by state historic preservation officers (SHPOs) during the NEPA process. Delays in bridge rehabilitation and other essential rail safety projects have been a particular problem for the Alaska Railroad.

In the 2015 FAST Act, Congress passed a requirement to give railroads the same streamlining protection as Congress earlier passed for the Interstate Highway System. Specifically, individual elements such as historic train stations and bridges can be given special protection, but an entire railroad (like the law for the Interstate Highway System) cannot be treated as a gigantic “historic district.”

However, the 2015 streamlining provision for railroads has not been properly implemented to the same extent as the provision for the Interstate Highway System, so the same problems of needless delays continue 10 years late after Congress thought it solved the problem.

1. If confirmed, will you pledge to do all you can as FRA Administrator to make the SHPO process less cumbersome for FRA rail safety grants to railroads?

Answer: Yes.

2. Further, if you find that the federal law passed in 2015 is inadequate, will you recommend changes to improve it?

Answer: Yes.