

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL ALBERT RUTHERFORD

Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of the Office of Multimodal Freight Infrastructure & Policy

Before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation United States Senate

July 23, 2025

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, Members of the Committee—

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. It is an incredible honor to be President Trump's nominee as the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Multimodal Freight Infrastructure and Policy, more simply referred to as the Freight Office.

I am grateful for the confidence placed in me by both President Trump and Secretary Duffy to lead this relatively new office and to shepherd its continued development under their leadership in the years ahead.

I am also grateful for my family, who is here with me today. My wife Francesca, who is not just the love of my life but – pardon me for saying, Senators – the most interesting person that I have ever met. She is joined by our daughter, Maria Vittoria, a rising freshman and Research Scholar in the Honors Program at the University of Florida, and our 12 year old son John Carlo, a source of both great pride and constant entertainment.

As I sit here today before the Senate Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee, I am aware of the expectations for this position – especially outside this room. Industry has long lamented the fact that “freight doesn’t vote.” The introduction of the Freight Office was hailed as finally giving a voice to freight. While much has been accomplished, still much more is expected.

I worked in industry. After studying International Finance & Commerce at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service and getting a Masters in International Economics & Management at SDA Bocconi in Milan, Italy, I worked in consumer goods at Johnson & Johnson and Adidas in Europe, where I learned a lot about sourcing and distribution. Then I joined CSX in 2008, starting out in Intermodal before ultimately managing everything moving on the railroad except Intermodal and Coal. During that time, I participated in a number of strategic initiatives like supporting the National Gateway infrastructure project, launching the UMAX interline container program in conjunction with Union Pacific, championing 50-foot boxcar reinvestments, and assisting customers during the roll-out of Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR).

It is my sincere hope that all those who have long promoted the creation of a high level Freight Office will view the first Assistant Secretary appointment of someone with my industry

experience as a reflection of the commitment by President Trump and Secretary Duffy to advance the cause for freight.

The mission of the Freight Office goes well beyond simply creating ease-of-doing business by establishing a primary (though not sole) point of contact for all things freight-related. *Ad hoc* coordination must make way for a more systematic and holistic approach to freight planning throughout U.S. DOT, while partnering with state DOTs and across the Administration as appropriate.

The proposed Draft National Multimodal Freight Network with over 78 thousand roadway miles, 80 thousand rail miles, 21 thousand waterway miles, 140 marine ports and 65 airports, plays a fundamental role in much of the activities of the Freight Office. Given this significance, we must get it right. If confirmed, the Freight Office will follow up on all concerns regarding the current draft, including those regarding “missing mileage” in some states.

Building upon this work, the National Freight Strategic Plan aims to drive and align with State DOT freight plans to bolster economic growth and international competitiveness based on a shared vision of the future. In addition to addressing bottlenecks and bringing key infrastructure back to a state of good repair, this requires identifying critical freight facilities and corridors with vital interconnections to enhance overall performance of our nation’s freight system. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the timely update of the National Freight Strategic Plan consistent with current market dynamics including shifting trade flows, the reshoring of manufacturing, and a renewed emphasis on industries of national importance. I will also seek to ensure that freight grant programs within the Office of the Secretary and across U.S. DOT support key priorities of proper Federal interest.

Another key function of the Freight Office is to facilitate data sharing opportunities among freight stakeholders. Recognizing that you cannot manage what you do not know, Freight Logistics Optimization Works or FLOW provides freight stakeholders with invaluable supply chain visibility, enabling them to react more proactively to forward-looking changes in the operating environment at our nation’s ports. Despite early successes, there is still so much more that the Freight Office can do to build upon its earlier efforts.

If I am fortunate to be confirmed as the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Multimodal Freight Infrastructure & Policy, I will devote myself to helping the Secretary promote safe, efficient, and resilient freight transportation across all modes and along the full spectrum of Supply Chain and Logistics, from sourcing to distribution, from America’s heartland to the Big City and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my statement, and I would be happy to answer the Committee’s questions.