

STB CHAIRMAN DANIEL R. ELLIOTT III DISCONTINUES ANNUAL LETTER TO RAIL INDUSTRY SEEKING END-OF-YEAR OUTLOOK

Surface Transportation Board Chairman Daniel R. Elliott III is discontinuing the practice of sending an annual letter to the railroad industry asking Class I and other railroads to comment on their end-of-year outlook for traffic volumes and operations. The Chairman's decision reflects changes that have occurred in the rail industry since mid-2000, and also the weekly reporting of service performance data to the agency by Class I railroads.

The practice of sending an annual letter to the rail industry began in 2004. The letters were motivated by severe capacity constraints and periodic service disruptions that plagued the rail industry during the last decade. Thus, the Chairman sought written assurance from the industry as to its preparedness to handle the seasonal spike in agricultural, intermodal, and energy-related traffic, occurring each year.

In recent years, however, railroad shipping patterns have changed. There is no longer a highly-conspicuous peak season. And, in October 2014, the Board began collecting weekly service performance reports from the Class I railroads, providing a snapshot of the industry in near real-time. Thus, the need for the "Fall Peak letter" has diminished.

"I appreciate the railroad industry's past responses to the Chairman's annual end-of-year outlook letter. Over the years, the responses have been very helpful to the agency in assessing the preparedness and resilience of the network. However, the industry has changed significantly over the past twelve years. With this in mind, it is appropriate to discontinue the practice, especially in light of service performance data that Class I railroads are providing on a weekly basis."

During his tenure, Chairman Elliott has sought to enhance the transparency of the agency and to facilitate a more open dialogue with STB stakeholders outside of formal proceedings. In this regard, although Chairman Elliott has decided to discontinue the practice of requesting outlook letters, he expects the railroad industry to be forthcoming to the agency in the event of unanticipated service disruptions.

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