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November 4, 2009

The Honorable Heath Shuler
US House of Representatives
422 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Shuler:

WaysSouth is a grassroots nonprofit organization that preserves and protects the unique heritage and environment of Southern Appalachia by promoting responsible transportation practices. With more than forty organizations working with us, we represent over 1.2 million citizens, including many in the 11th District. We also have three Board members from your area, who you will see listed below.

We at WaysSouth are concerned about the increasing volume of traffic on our roads and highways. Whether we're talking about maintaining our road system, pollution from traffic, highway safety, or the rising tide of oil imports, it has a practical effect on our daily lives. Freight volumes are expected to grow by more than 90 percent by 2035. This freight will have to move to supply our farms, factories, and homes. Our highway system, no matter how much we build, simply can't handle this increase. Fortunately, there's a better way: our railroads. By expanding rail capacity in our state and country, we can meet this challenge in an environmentally friendly and fiscally responsible way.

Thank you for cosponsoring H.R. 272. This is a good start and, if enacted into law, will help address many of our concerns with regard to rail capacity and economic growth, while protecting our fragile environment.

But the railroad industry can't do its part for additional capacity if they can't invest in new infrastructure. Unfortunately, we have heard that legislation may be introduced in Washington that would overturn the balanced regulation of the railroad industry. This legislation would force the industry to cut back on investments in capacity expansion at a time when they are urgently needed.

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As a Member of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, you have a crucial vote on this issue. Overturning balanced regulation will lead to more clogged roads and highways, more pollution of our air and water, compromise our safety and health, and make us even more dependent of foreign oil.

Thankfully, H.R 272 will have the opposite effect by encouraging additional investment in our railway system to create additional capacity, while stimulating job creation and economic activity. Thank you again for cosponsoring this legislation; it will help us prepare for tomorrow's capacity challenges, create new, well-paying jobs, and benefit our most environmentally friendly form of surface transportation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly Demuth", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Holly Demuth
Executive Director