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September 11, 2009

Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Washington Grain Commission is supportive of Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant funding for the rehabilitation and upgrade of the Palouse-Coulee City Railroad rail branch lines in eastern Washington. The TIGER funds have been applied for by the PCC Rail Authority representing Whitman, Spokane, Lincoln and Grant counties through which the rail lines run.

It is estimated that more than twenty percent of Washington's wheat is shipped to market via the shortlines and more could be moved by rail with upgraded lines. Years of deferred maintenance by the Class I rail carriers prior to spin-off to shortline carriers has left the lines in need of rehabilitation. Help is needed to bring the lines up to viable operating conditions. The lines provide capacity and competition in moving not only grain, but many other products to market as well as inbound products such as crop inputs.

Improved rail lines provide rural communities access to markets that further economic development goals. The rail lines also help increase safety and reduce emissions, fuel consumption and wear and tear on rural county roads and state highways by reducing the number of trucks. One rail car of grain takes about four large trucks off the roads.

Washington State recognized the importance of the lines to state and local economies and purchased the lines in 2007 to prevent abandonment. The use of TIGER funds to rehabilitate deteriorating infrastructure in eastern Washington would prove to be an excellent partnership between federal, state and local governments to ensure sound infrastructure and revitalize rural communities in Washington State.

We respectfully request your support of the PCC Rail Authority's TIGER grant request.

Sincerely,

Hal Johnson
Chairman