

Statement of Ron Roberts, Chairman of Metrolink – SCRRA Board of Directors
For a Members Briefing at the Request of
Senator Barbara Boxer
United States Senate, Washington DC
Tuesday, September 23, 2008 3:00 pm

Senator Boxer, members of the Committee, I am Ron Roberts, Chairman of the Metrolink Board of Directors.

I want to personally thank you for your leadership in calling for this briefing on the tragic collision that occurred last week in our great state. We, as a community know you understand the critical linkages Metrolink provides to all of Southern California and because of your leadership today, we have an opportunity to positively change passenger rail service in America, and we need to work together.

The recent events surrounding the Metrolink incident have been catastrophic for all of us involved, especially the 25 passengers and a crew member who lost their lives and the 135 passengers who were injured. You have shown yourself to be a solutions driven individual which is one reason why you have served our great state for nearly 18 years.

The real issue is that the United States is in the 21st Century and we're operating our passenger rail and freight rail systems as if we have a nation with population of 100 million people and are isolated from the global economy.

21st Century rail must not continue to look like our grandparents' railroads. This country has not kept up with the pressing growth in goods movement and increasing demand for transit and passenger rail.

Metrolink service began 16 years ago, operating on freight tracks. We continue to operate our entire 388 mile passenger train network in one of the most congested urban areas in the country, on tracks that are shared with national freight and passenger trains. Each day, Metrolink's 145 trains travel through 422 highway-rail grade crossings.

The fact that passenger rail is in competition for capacity with the freight rail system in our nation, let alone in Southern California, where 44% of our nation's goods come through the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, is truly deplorable for our nation and Southern Californians. It is a fact that must not be passed on to our nation's next generation.

The need for transportation infrastructure investment is critical. Your own Congressionally created commission, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, in their January report, states that transit ridership will increase from 9 billion in 2005 to 14 billion by 2035. And the necessary investment to keep up with transit and passenger rail growth over the next 15 years is \$14-\$32 billion each year.

These growth estimates are real: Over the last three months alone, Metrolink's ridership is up 14% from last year due to gasoline prices and increasing freeway congestion.

We can all sit here today and place blame or we can have a substantive discussion on the solutions that we, as responsible partners in rail, can put into action.

Some of the solutions are echoes of testimony you heard just three weeks ago at your hearing in Los Angeles: 1) more funding, 2) make passenger rail and transit a priority, 3) invest and build dual track in major freight rail corridors like Southern California, and 4) grade separate roadways and rail lines.

Solutions I would add include: enact the rail safety legislation; pass the Amtrak bill, and advance the development of positive train control systems. These solutions will move us forward, now.

Metrolink strongly supports your and Senator Feinstein's legislation mandating railroads to develop and implement positive train control systems.

For Southern California, inter-operable PTC systems would be used by the Union Pacific Railroad, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, Amtrak, Metrolink, and Coaster.

Metrolink has initiated ten key steps to support an eventual PTC system. These steps include: building a centralized dispatch system, upgrading the signals and communications equipment to a microprocessor and solid state based system, starting the installation of a fiber optic communications network, and starting to digitally map the railroad. All of these steps are required for PTC. Much more work must be done. We believe that current development efforts must be accelerated to the fullest extent possible.

All of these solutions: PTC, grade separations, dual track, new funding authorizations, require a public-private partnership of responsible investment on many levels: locally, regionally, statewide and nationally.

As the Chairman of the Board of Metrolink, I want to extend my sincerest regret for this situation. However, this collision is not just about what the NTSB investigation determines to be the cause. It's about our nation's lack of investment in passenger rail as a whole.

Senator Boxer, you and Senator Feinstein understand this issue better than most members of Congress. You and I live with this every day in Southern California where the passenger and freight rail network is stretched to capacity.

Thank you again for your leadership and courage in working toward solutions to ensure the safety of every single Metrolink passenger and the integrity of our transportation system. Together, we will improve passenger rail in California and the entire nation.