



**Transportation
for America**

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The Honorable Martin J. Oberman, Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

Docket No EP 774: (Sub-No. 1, Notice of Passenger Rail Advisory Committee Vacancies)

Dear Chairman Oberman,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a recommendation for the Passenger Rail Advisory Committee. I am pleased to nominate John Robert Smith to the Surface Transportation Board's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee to serve in one of the at-large representative positions. He can be reached at jrsmith@t4america.org or at 601-527-5040.

John Robert Smith currently serves as Chairman of Transportation for America, where he advises on strategy, capacity building, and national outreach. He became chairman in 2012 after leading Reconnecting America as President & CEO from 2009 to 2012. Prior to his role there, he served as Mayor of Meridian, Mississippi from 1993 to 2009. During his tenure as Mayor, John Robert received acclaim for his aggressive facilitation of the public-private partnerships that resulted in over \$430M of infrastructure projects that bolstered the economy and quality of life for the people of Meridian. A recognized authority on public and private transportation & development funding, he guided the development and construction of the Southeast's first multi-modal transportation center, Meridian Union Station, a \$7 million historic restoration project that created a new multimodal transportation center, dramatically increased use of the station, raised property values and city tax receipts, and lowered crime in the station's neighborhood.

John Robert is a long-time leader and advocate on behalf of effective and efficient passenger rail, with thoughtful and insightful perspectives on how these services benefit the communities they serve, from economic development to improved mobility and connectivity to opportunities. Through his work with rail authorities such as the Southern Rail Commission and the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, John Robert offers analysis of federal and state barriers to their goals, policies and actions that would help them overcome these barriers, as well as provide local strategic advice and recommendations that make it possible for them to develop and expand passenger rail services.

In what is now the passenger rail title in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, John Robert had a pivotal role in its formulation. Mindful of the challenges and opportunities to



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build and operate a national passenger rail system oriented towards the customer and their community's access, John Robert provided integral guidance and support to staff of various House and Senate offices, in addition to the Senate Commerce Committee and House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. That guidance pointed out key policy, operational, and funding challenges and intersected it with the front line experiences by passenger rail customers and staff. The current passenger rail policy framework in the United States today is a result of John Robert's steadfast advocacy and expertise.

Additionally, John Robert is a nationally sought out expert advising diverse audiences from municipal and state practitioners and elected officials, to the business community and the general public (in places such as Montana, Utah, Ohio, Texas, among other states and regions in the United States) on the value, importance, and potential that passenger rail brings. This experience, combined with his time as Chairman of the Amtrak's Board of Directors, demonstrates John Robert's exceptional ability to engage with diverse stakeholders and his depth of knowledge on the specific challenges impacting passenger rail operations, particularly in small and rural communities.

A two-time graduate of the University of Mississippi and a Graduate of the Senior Executive in State & Local Government program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, he is the co-owner of Point Investments and is a senior policy advisor to DC-based Smart Growth America. John Robert has served on numerous boards including the US Conference of Mayors, National Forum on the Future of Passenger Rail, and as a Chairman of Amtrak's Board of Directors from 1998-2003; he was chairman of the board for his last two years.

John Robert Smith is a valued authority in the passenger rail industry, mindful of not only the local context, but also the holistic picture of how passenger rail interfaces nationally. John Robert would be a strong value-add to the Passenger Rail Advisory Committee and is willing and committed to serve in a representative member capacity, if given the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration of John Robert Smith's nomination to the Surface Transportation Board's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions on this nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Beth Osborne", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Beth Osborne
Director, Transportation for America