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Kansas
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Mike Beam, Secretary

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Office of Chief Counsel
November 13, 2026
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November 13, 2026

The Honorable Patrick Fuchs
Chairman, Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

The Honorable Michelle Schultz
Vice Chair, Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

The Honorable Karen Hedlund
Member, Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

Richard J. Kloster
Member, Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

Re: Docket No. FD 36873

Dear Chairman Fuchs, Vice Chair Schultz, and Members Hedlund and Kloster:

As the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, part of my job is to promote the agricultural industry and ensure economic viability for Kansas farmers and ranchers. I want to advocate for Kansas's agricultural interests to be considered when major regulatory decisions ensue, specifically as they pertain to the proposed merger of the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads. This letter serves as my official comment to the Surface Transportation Board regarding the merger proposal in the docket referenced above.

Agriculture represents Kansas's largest economic driver, accounting for almost $86 billion in direct and indirect economic output for the state. When you combine its economic impact with the outsized role that agriculture plays in our workforce, the agricultural industry has the broadest impact off any industry in the state on our overall economy.

As Kansas is land-locked, rail networks are a critical component of ensuring that Kansas's agricultural producers have a reliable, competitive, and resilient system to ship their products out of state. Rail networks are critical for our producers to access fertilizers, farm equipment, and other inputs at an affordable level, which has become increasingly difficult due to the impacts of tariffs and geopolitical tension in major shipping lanes throughout the world.

Agricultural producers are price takers when it comes to their input prices and the selling price of their commodities. Any action that would further limit competition and transportation capacity may increase the price of shipping that could harm our state's competitive advantages in beef and grain quality, value-added packing and processing opportunities. Kansas' centralized location offers some advantages in shipping to either coast or through the nation's ports along the gulf coast while relying on rail.

Kansas farmers and ranchers require competitive and reliable rail options so that they can join producers from across the country in providing reliable and affordable food and feed supply for the USA and the world. To effectively add value to many of our products, rail is required for shipping to and from destination mills, packers, and other processing facilities, often involving trucks, barges, short-line rail, and more than one Class I railroad.

As agricultural stakeholders have shared, a merger of this size would represent over 40% of total originated carloads across major commodity groups and more than one-third of all grain rail movements nationwide. As a result, competition at key interchange points — such as Chicago, St. Louis, or New Orleans — would become more limited, which may result in increased costs for agricultural producers unless the Surface Transportation Board provides clear and enforceable standards.

Kansas farmers and ranchers want to ensure that origin-destination options continue to be accessible, and that changes in rates, service terms, or network rationalization do not lead to a further reduction in competitive options for agricultural shippers. Further, it is imperative that any merger of this magnitude does not impact freight traffic in such a way that it harms elevators, ports, manufacturing facilities, and transload operations that are served by multiple railroads.

Kansas agriculture producers share many of the same concerns as those in surrounding states. All states rely on the Surface Transportation Board to ensure a competitive, accessible, and reliable rail network. The long-term security of the agriculture industry requires dedication to competition that protects our farmers' and ranchers' ability to move and sell their crops and livestock at a fair price. Any approval should also include assurances that trucking, barge, or rail services and networks are maintained or expanded.

As pending merger of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern is considered, I encourage you to prioritize the needs and interests of our farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses in the heartland of this country. The health and long-term viability of the markets relying on transportation networks is of the upmost importance. Protecting the economic interests of our farmers and ranchers is critical in maintaining a safe, efficient, and affordable food system in the United States, and any potential negative impact to their livelihood or way of life must be avoided.

Sincerely,

Mike Beam

Mike Beam
Secretary, Kansas Department of Agriculture

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that on this day, November 13, 2026, have served copies of this document upon all parties of record in this proceeding, by email to those parties who have accepted email service and by first-class mail to all others, consistent with 49 C.F.R. § 1104.12(a)

Austin C. Vincent

Austin C. Vincent
Staff Attorney
Kansas Department of Agriculture
Manhattan, KS 66502

Date: November 13, 2026

CC: All Parties of Record