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The Honorable Daniel Elliott III
Chairman
United States Surface Transportation Board
Washington, DC 20423

The Honorable Deb Miller
Vice Chairman
United States Surface Transportation Board
Washington, DC 20423

The Honorable Ann Begeman
Commissioner
United States Surface Transportation Board
Washington, DC 20423

RE: STB Ex Parte No. 711 (Sub-No. 1), Reciprocal Switching

Dear Chairman Elliott, Vice Chairman Miller, and Commissioner Begeman:

The Virginia Manufacturers Association (VMA) is writing to express our support for revised competitive switching rules. Since 1922 the VMA has served as Industry's Advocate™ and our mission is to create the best business environment in the United States for world-class advanced technology businesses to manufacture and headquarter their companies for maximum productivity and profitability.

We strongly support the principles of the Board's proposed rule that would allow rail customers with no competitive transportation options to request to have their freight moved to another Class I railroad at a reasonably accessible interchange. While the STB's authority to allow competitive switching is clear, no shipper has ever obtained switching under the STB's current rules. The STB's proposal to reduce these regulatory barriers is not only consistent with the Board's statutory mandate, it is good for manufacturers, farmers and energy providers in Virginia and across the U.S.

Competition is the cornerstone of a strong and efficient economy, and policymakers and industry typically embrace it as a better alternative to regulatory oversight. Unfortunately, opening comments filed by the Association of American Railroads and individual Class I railroads not only oppose this particular proposal, but seemingly any change in STB policy that would facilitate greater rail-to-rail competition. Their assertion that an improved competitive environment will damage the fundamental economics of the U.S. freight rail system is simply unfounded and runs counter to basic free market principles.

If switching cases are too complex, timely and costly then the new rules will be ineffective and will not be used. The Board should adopt a final rule that will result in streamlined proceedings before the Board. Specifically, we support recommendations made by the Shipper Coalition for Railroad Competition in their opening comments.

We appreciate the Boards' consideration of this letter and urge the agency to adopt workable new rules that will help make our member companies more competitive in the global marketplace.