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United States Senate

May 28, 2015

The Honorable Deb Miller,
Acting Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

The Honorable Ann Begeman
Vice Chairman
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

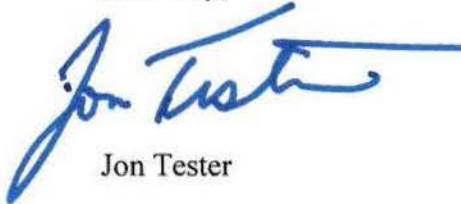
Dear Acting Chairman Miller and Vice Chairman Begeman:

I write to urge the Surface Transportation Board to extend the public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Tongue River Railroad by 120 days. This is a lengthy and complex EIS that contains eight different alternatives spanning four large counties in Montana. In addition to the residents, farmers, and ranchers of southeastern Montana directly impacted by the proposed railroad, the project could also affect many down-line communities and shippers that rely on the greater rail network to move agriculture and other made-in-Montana goods. It is critical that all affected parties receive sufficient time to thoroughly analyze the EIS and provide comment to the Board for its full consideration.

While I appreciate the Board's decision to allow 60 days of public comment on the draft EIS, many of the Montanans that could be directly affected by the proposed railroad work in agriculture, which is a demanding occupation with long and unpredictable hours, especially in the springtime. A 120-day extension of the public comment period would go a long way toward ensuring that these farmers and ranchers have an opportunity to participate in the document's public review.

I commend the Board for hosting 10 public meetings in several communities between June 8 and June 13 and two online public meetings on June 17, and I encourage the Board to aggressively advertise these public meetings in the coming weeks to ensure interested individuals are aware of the opportunity. I hope that the Board will maintain this spirit of public participation and grant my request for a 120-day extension. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester