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Executive Director, **Stacey Mortensen**

STATEMENT OF
STACEY MORTENSEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SAN JOAQUIN REGIONAL RAIL COMMISSION

BEFORE THE
UNITED STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RAILROADS, PIPELINES, AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018

Chairman Denham, Ranking Member Capuano, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this important hearing and inviting me to testify about our experience implementing PTC at likely the smallest commuter rail service in the country.

First of all, I want to note our sincere appreciation for the Congressional delegation in our service area, especially the ones who serve on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee.

Chairman Denham, Rep. Garamendi and Rep. DeSaulnier have done fantastic jobs in Congress representing their constituents and our humble agency. And we are honored to have them represent us on the Committee. Your leadership in all things transportation has been integral to our continued success.

Second, I would also want to thank our Class I railroad stakeholders – Union Pacific and BNSF. They have been incredibly collaborative in so many ways, and we wouldn't have our successful services without their cooperation and leadership.

First a bit about our agency. Under a consolidated staffing model which allows us to be agile, we manage both the ACE commuter service and the Amtrak San Joaquins. One runs up the central spine of the state and the other runs east west from the Central Valley to the Bay Area. We are headquartered in Stockton in a small valley county and while we don't have large budgets, we make the most out of what we have. Our state recently allocated funding for long awaited expansions to Sacramento and further south in the Central Valley and we are focused on delivering new service in the next 3 years.

Our four daily ACE trains operate during the commute hours between California's Central Valley and the Silicon Valley, with connections to San Francisco. On three of those four weekday trains, ridership is over 1,000 passengers. The ACE Service celebrates a 20-year anniversary on October 19th and has been funded mostly by local transportation sales taxes in San Joaquin, Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

Let me be clear about one thing from the beginning: The Board and the entire team are 150% committed towards safety. We have undertaken all the steps we could – and will continue to do that – to fully implement PTC by the deadline. But let me also be very clear and direct in admitting that we definitely have had some challenges – challenges we have solved and are continuing to work through. Other things regrettably, are not directly under our control—yet we push ahead.

While being the smallest can have its advantages in terms of agency flexibility, responsiveness and close access to the customers, in a national process vying for the attention of the single manufacturer of PTC equipment and software, it has positioned us toward the end of the line.

We were quite simply at the mercy of the marketplace.

Issues that arise in the implementation and testing for other agencies before us can have cascading impacts on our program that are beyond our control. We operate on a host freight railroad, so our only equipment requirement involves our six locomotives, eight cab cars and the back-office server.

The ACE PTC equipment was ordered in March of 2017, well in advance of this year's federal deadline. Because of the many other orders across the country, the equipment was not delivered until April of this year. Further, the vendor couldn't establish a site workforce until late June. This week, six of our 14 locomotives and cab cars (or 42%) will be fully outfitted. All units will be completed prior to the end of October and test trains will begin operating every Saturday starting October 6th. Testing will continue through the end of December under Union Pacific's testing plan.

The back-office server has been approved by Union Pacific and the consultant is ready to start configuring the equipment with the "Slot 10" cards as soon as the first testing unit has been validated. We have been trying very hard to be forward moving and proactive in our implementation.

Why has it taken so long to get to this point? While there are several reasons, one example of the difficult issues we've had to work through was equipment recalls.

Radio antennas for early implementation agencies began to fail due to water intrusion, resulting in the product being recalled. We already had the ACE kits ordered with the "old" antennas and several had been installed along with the cabling. The priority for delivery of new antennas was focused on systems that were already in operation and those in the northern states where water intrusion conditions were more threatening.

Rather than wait the undetermined amount of time for the new antennas to be delivered, we continued installation—and will begin testing with—the old antennas which have not yet failed. We will replace the “old” antennas and cabling after our PTC program is completed and certified.

On the Amtrak San Joaquin side, Amtrak was able to make a large, expedited purchase of the onboard equipment within the last year, so the San Joaquins are already in testing mode. However, this pushed ACE a little further out. But each experience learned in the San Joaquin roll out is valuable to ensuring the ACE program meets the deadline.

One benefit of being last in line is taking advantage of the lessons learned at other agencies. FRA’s PTC Summits have been very helpful and both FRA Washington and our FRA District 7 staff have offered assistance throughout the process. In addition, the General Manager of our Herzog O&M contractor has been through the PTC process. Given his experience with Northstar, we are able to move faster and he is firm in his commitment that we will meet the PTC deadline. Another partner agency has also offered us two antenna kits if we experience any interruption to the installation schedule. In an effort to achieve compliance, Wabtec has assigned more staff and is utilizing our Herzog contractor for some tasks such as pulling cable and welding brackets. I believe that we will meet the deadline.

Another delay that was beyond our control was due to the fact that ACE trains operate on the Caltrain Corridor for approximately four miles in the San Jose area. As you may know, Caltrain will be filing for an Alternative Schedule. We cannot complete work on that stretch without their cooperation.

We look forward to adding our name to the list of agencies who are operating the new PTC system.

I thank you for the opportunity to share our experience with you today and look forward to your questions.