



Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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December 23, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson,

I write to thank you for the provisions to strengthen the autonomy of the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The American Statistical Association appreciates your efforts and your recognition of the importance of timely, accurate, and objective statistical data to informing wise transportation decision making. We also appreciate the FAST Act acknowledges the importance of BTS having control over its budget, publications, and information technology (IT) to ensure its products are perceived as objective and credible.

We welcome the additional responsibility for the BTS of the new port performance freight statistics program. It signals your understanding of the importance of statistical data supporting our economy and smart, efficient government. We note however BTS was not provided additional funding to start this program and they are already operating with severe budget constraints. Indeed, its budget has been held flat and even decreased since the early 2000's. Between inflation and operating costs diverted by the Research and Innovative Technology Administration and its successor in the Office of the Secretary, BTS has not had the funds to perform important surveys like the intercity passenger travel survey and the vehicle inventory and use survey. We hope you will help address BTS's constricted budget so that BTS can carry out its important work—like the surveys just mentioned—while implementing the new port performance freight statistics program. We also hope that BTS will be provided the funds to accelerate efforts to develop products in response to new trends and take advantage of advances like Big Data.

Congratulations on the FAST Act becoming law. We look forward to working with you on BTS issues in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Morganstein".

David Morganstein
President, American Statistical Association