



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad  
Administration**

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

OCT 16 2014

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

Thank you for your September 30, 2014, letter to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) about the condition of four BNSF Railway (BNSF) railroad bridges between La Crosse and Genoa, Wisconsin. FRA investigated your concern and visited the four bridges depicted in the photos you provided, as well as eight other bridges in the area (six of which are similar in age and construction). The bridges were assessed to determine their condition and to ascertain whether they are safe for continued railroad service. BNSF bridge inspection reports for these bridges were compared with the actual conditions of the bridges to evaluate the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the railroad's reports.

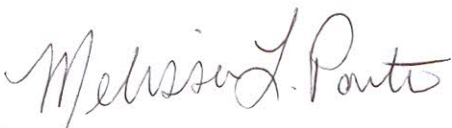
The four bridges highlighted in your letter were built between 1911 and 1923. They are primarily reinforced concrete span bridges that exhibit deterioration consistent with their age. This deterioration consists of map cracking, spalling concrete, and areas of exposed reinforcing bars that are typical for concrete railroad bridges of this type and age.

This past summer, an incipient failure of the end of one span within the Coon Creek Bridge at Stoddard, Wisconsin, was discovered by BNSF during a periodic bridge inspection. BNSF immediately halted trains for about 12 hours until the defective span could be replaced. At the same time, timber blocking was installed beneath nine additional spans that appeared susceptible to the same mode of failure. Earlier in 2014, BNSF placed timber blocking on both sides of a concrete pier due to severe deterioration of two out of the six concrete piles making up that pier. BNSF intends to replace this bridge in 2015; BNSF's contractor has already begun site preparation work. Until the bridge replacement is completed, BNSF is monitoring the structure, including the temporary timber blocking, through twice-weekly examination of the blocking and supported spans.

The FRA's investigation determined that BNSF was inspecting its bridges at least twice as often as required by the FRA bridge safety standards, which require inspection at least once per calendar year. FRA found that BNSF's bridge inspection reports accurately documented existing bridge conditions. No conditions were detected during FRA's investigation nor disclosed by BNSF inspection reports that inhibit the ability of these bridges to safely carry train traffic. BNSF is inspecting these bridges and managing their safety consistent with the requirements of the FRA bridge safety standards.

I appreciate your interest in this matter and look forward to working with you on this and other transportation issues of importance to you and your constituents. If you have further questions, please call me or have your staff contact Mr. Kevin Thompson, FRA's Associate Administrator for Communications and Legislative Affairs, at (202) 366-1299 or [Kevin.Thompson@dot.gov](mailto:Kevin.Thompson@dot.gov).

Sincerely,



for Joseph C. Szabo  
Administrator